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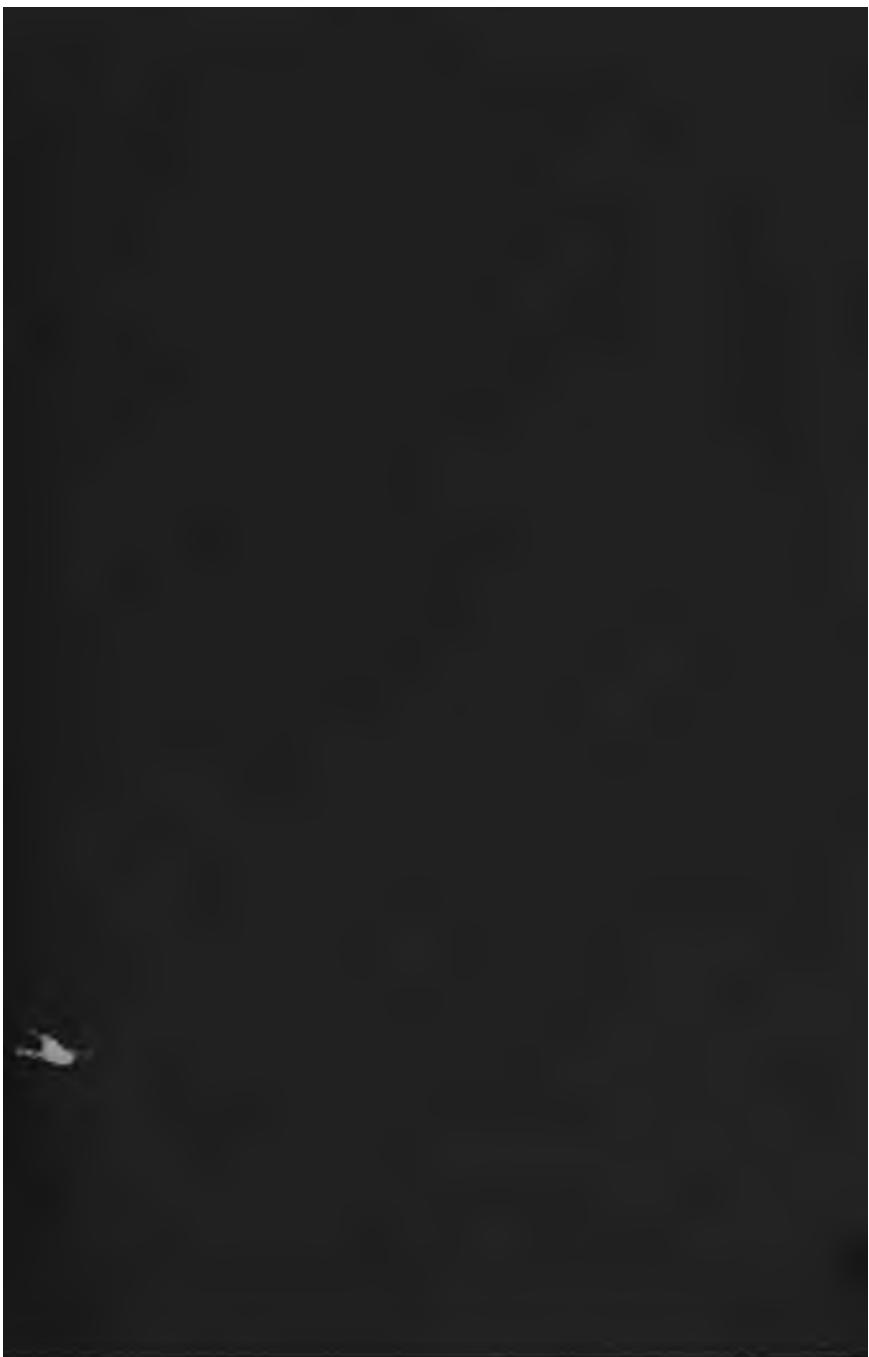
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# HOLDING FAST

AND

## LETTING GO.

A Novel.

BY

BRUDIE BRUDIE.

*IN TWO VOLUMES.*

VOL. II.

CAMBRIDGE: J. HALL & SON.  
LONDON: SIMPKIN & MARSHALL;  
WHITTAKER & CO.

1874.

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25/- f. 23*g.*



## CONTENTS OF VOL. II.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. "THEY MOVE WITH NOISELESS FEET GRAVELY AND SWEETLY ROUND US" . . .	I
II. "MY SPIRIT FLEW IN FEATHERS THEN" . . .	23
III. "THE TINY TRUMPETING GNAT CAN BREAK OUR DREAM" . . . . .	41
IV. "FRIENDS WHO INSIST ON PLAY OR PAY" . .	57
V. "SHE SAYS, 'TIS LOVE HATH Bribed HER TO THIS DEED" . . . . .	64
VI. "LIFE IS REAL! LIFE IS EARNEST!" . . . .	77
VII. "MY HEART HATH ITS LOVE" . . . . .	87
VIII. "BUT A LIE WHICH IS PART A TRUTH IS A HARDER MATTER TO FIGHT" . . . . .	93
IX. "A MOMENT'S THINKING IS AN HOUR IN WORDS" . . . . .	119
X. "AND LEARNS HER GONE, AND FAR FROM HOME" . . . . .	127

---

CHAPTER	PAGE
XI. "AND WINTRY WINDS THAT PIPE SO LOUD"	401
XII. "NOTHING USELESS IS, OR LOW"	154
XIII. "BUT NOW THE LIVING CAUSE MY PAIN"	164
XIV. "IN SOOTH DECEIT MAKETH NO MORTAL GAY"	176
XV. "IS IT A FOOLISH DREAM, AN IDLE AND VAGUE SUPERSTITION?"	181
XVI. "ANGELS OF LIFE AND DEATH ALIKE ARE HIS!"	195
XVII. "NOW WAITING TO BE MADE A WIFE"	204
XVIII. "BUT I KNOW NOT HOW WE LIVED THOSE NIGHTS"	209
XIX. "OF PERFECT WIFEHOOD AND PURE LOWLI- HEAD"	222
XX. "I MUST TELL HER, OR DIE"	226
XXI. "REQUIRING AT HER HAND THE GREATEST GIFT"	249

## HOLDING FAST AND LETTING GO.

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### CHAPTER I.

"They move with noiseless feet gravely and sweetly  
round us."

THE twilight was still casting its dim, uncertain shadows around when Susanne ushered Stanley Wyldish into Violet's boudoir.

That part of the room where she sat was screened from the faint light which entered the window, and was, therefore, darker than any other.

He could have traversed it though he were blindfolded. Waking or sleeping it was never long from his imagination.

But the whole apartment was familiar to him.

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He knew its brightness when the summer sun shone over it, and its pleasant comfort when darker days arrived, and the cheerful blaze of the fire sent a glowing light over the mirrors and paintings on its walls.

It was first shown to him by a happy husband as a fitting chamber for the sweet presence of an idolized wife.

He had known it afterwards, when that wife was made desolate. And he had known it also as she sat there with her tiny baby, and received him with a blush so bright, that, until it faded, and left her more transparently white than before, she almost appeared to be the Violet of other days.

Again, when little May began to walk alone, it was the floor upon which her baby feet had first moved, and Violet had proudly taken him thither to witness the achievement of her darling.

Twice he had entered it with a heart well-nigh bursting with sorrow and alarm. Twice

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he had rested the insensible form of Violet upon the soft cushions of the velvet couch.

As minor details, even when our minds are most powerfully absorbed, oftentimes arrest and fix our attention, so he had been forced to notice the beauty of her richly-waving, golden-tinted, chestnut-coloured hair, and of her fair, pale cheek, as he placed her there.

He knew the spot upon which every chair and table rested; but, in the absence of this knowledge, the sound of passionate weeping would have guided him to the only space upon earth where he coveted to stand.

The convulsive sobs which had been pent up and suppressed for many hours were almost shattering with their violence the slender frame of Violet.

Stanley Wyldish approached her softly, and then remained by her side, motionless and silent for some minutes, during which he felt himself to be living ages of doubt and misery.

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All the past, and all the future, were merged in the present, with one throbbing anxiety to take her to his heart at all cost, and to implore her to rest there henceforward.

Every thought which he possessed concentrated and converged around that weeping figure near him. Grief, joy, penitence, resolution, everything that hitherto had constituted his existence, were as nothing to him in comparison with his eager longing to tell his love and plead for hers.

He flung away all obstacles, and the difficulties which he had woven around himself, while he determined to brave all, rather than allow her to leave him thus.

The summons of Susanne had arrived as a reprieve to him.

He had not hoped to see Violet again that evening, and the hideous fear of separation from her was increasing the misery in his heart.

With the irrepressible force of a strong and

passionate love, swaying over his whole being, Stanley Wyldish sought only how to make his presence felt by Violet; but he knew not how to make it heard.

By degrees—little by little—her weeping became calmer, until, at length, it subsided into a feeble moan, as though she suffered pain.

By-and-by, she broke the silence.

“Let me stay here,” she murmured; but so faintly, that he could not gather the meaning of what she uttered.

“Let me stay here—oh! let me stay,” she repeated.

He bent low to listen, for her voice was faint and faltering.

“Do not ask me to go away to-morrow, Captain Wyldish.”

“God knows, Mrs. Vivien, how earnestly I have striven that you might remain,” he replied, trembling in every limb.

“I cannot go,” she interrupted, almost as

6        *Holding Fast and Letting Go.*

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though he had not spoken, while each word was uttered more piteously and beseechingly than the last.

"Let me remain here. It is not much to ask, after all my misery. Let me remain where Arundel and I were so happy, and where my May lived out her little life. Do not let me go away. I have tried to be brave. Indeed, I cannot go. Oh! do not let them take me away. Please do not. I could not live amongst strangers. I will be very good and patient, if only I may remain. It is too cruel to send me away."

"Cruel! Mrs. Vivien. Do you think that I can help it, or that I would not prevent it if it were possible?" asked Stanley Wyldish earnestly.

"I do not know," she continued in her broken-hearted tone of voice, "but Arundel told me that you would help me, and take care of me. I have never asked for anything before. I have tried to do that which

you and others wished ; but this is too hard. I cannot do it. Oh ! Captain Wyldish, I know that you loved my husband, and, for his sake, tell these people, whoever they are, that I will not leave his house. It seems like going farther away from Arundel and May."

Her weeping burst forth afresh as she added :—" Only tell me that I need not go to Lady Marchmont's to-morrow. You do not answer. Oh ! Captain Wyldish, how hard you have become."

It was the first time through all her trials, that Violet had so resisted a necessary circumstance, and her entreaties, together with the knowledge that he was powerless to avert that which so painfully distressed her, were extreme bitterness to him. He was quite unprepared for her appeal.

" For Arundel's sake," Violet began again, " let me tell them that I will not go away, if you do not wish to do so yourself."

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“ You cannot,” he answered, gently and sadly.

“ Cannot! Captain Wyldish. Because I have been quiet, crushed, and wretched, do you suppose that I either cannot or dare not? I am afraid of nothing here, where the spirit of Arundel seems all around me. It is his house, and I will not leave it. I am no child, while my sorrows have made me older than I really am. I will stay here and do battle for the honour of my husband, and for all that he has left to my care. I will not give up my right to this. I have been too unhappy to realize what going away meant. But you, Captain Wyldish, could not you have done something to prevent it? Tell me all my husband’s affairs, and let me be the judge whether it is right that I should go? Tell me, also, why I am asked to do so? I am calm now, and God will help me to understand your explanation. My place, my work in life, I feel is here.”

There was a dignity in the pathos of what she said, that could not be gainsaid, futile as he knew all explanation must prove. The girdle of strength, within which she entrenched herself, to do battle for what she deemed to be the honour of her husband, formed a momentary resistance to the flood-gates of affection, which Stanley Wyldish was longing to open, so that it might flow, with soothing, over the dreary waste of his own and Violet's sorrow.

He had no feeble-hearted woman before him, ready to flee to the refuge of any succour held out to her, and he recoiled within himself, more agitated than before, as he replied with hesitation :

“ You will, I know, believe me, when I assure you that every effort has been made to prevent what I hope and believe to be but a temporary banishment from this dear old place. It would take me long to explain the particulars to you. You are tired now, and

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worn out by the distress of the day, and I would not add to your fatigue. When you are well enough, I will lay all the details before you. I have not done so before, through my earnest desire to spare you anxiety. Forgive me if it was an error, since it was done for the best."

"Doubtless," was the somewhat coldly spoken reply, "and I am grateful to you, but it must not be so again. Once more I ask, let me remain here. The going away will almost kill me."

"Oh! Mrs. Vivien, you tax me too sorely," he cried. "It would be happiness indeed for me, could I prevent it, and," he added bitterly, "I am as wretched as yourself."

There was a pause.

"Why are you wretched?" she resumed thoughtfully. "You must not let my troubles make you so."

"I am wretched," he replied, "for many

reasons. I have been wretched—very—for weeks and months."

"Ah, yes," replied Violet. "I ought to have remembered that you have been much alone since May left us, and that you have stayed on to help me. I fear I have been selfish, and never thought of it; but Mrs. Matingley, I hope, took good care of you."

"It was not care," he made answer, sadly, "that I needed. If it had been Mrs. Matingley was all kindness, and I have been less wretched here, while hoping to be of service to you, than I should have been elsewhere. Have you no idea, Mrs. Vivien, what is causing my misery?"

"I—yes—no—I scarcely can tell; but everything combined has tried you too severely, perhaps, and you have scarcely seemed yourself since Arundel went away. I did not mean to be so petulant just now, for, indeed, I am most grateful to you. Will you

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forget it, remembering all the sorrow that is happening to me ? and oh, if possible, will you arrange for me to remain in my own home ?”

She held her hands towards him as if in supplication. He stooped, and grasped them firmly.

“ Listen to me, I implore you,” he said. “ I cannot prevent this going away—I, whose greatest happiness is to serve you, have no power to spare you this. I would give my life to prevent it, but it would be useless—useless for that purpose,” he continued, with passionate earnestness. “ Is it altogether quite useless to you, or will you accept it, most unworthy though it be, and take it for your own ? It must ever be yours, whether you will bless me by taking it or not. Oh ! Violet—may I call you so ?—will you listen to my love, and let it go with you to-morrow to stand between you and those whom you call strangers ? You are all alone ;

take it with you ; it will shield you while we are parted."

"I need no shield, Captain Wyldish ; I am not all alone. God, who has Arundel and May safe and happy with Him, is with me, and He will take care of me both to-morrow and every day. I have been wrong to let you know how distressed I am to-night ; I shall be better in the morning ; and you must regain your happiness and cheerfulness when you have left me. Pray for me," she whispered ; "that will help me more than anything. Your life is bright and happy, and must not be made sad by the grief of others."

"Only bright and happy," he replied, tenderly, "as your sweet will shall make it ; and if you need no earthly shield, still do not take from me the hope that my love may lessen your sadness, and that one day," and his voice sank almost to a whisper, "it will make you happy again."

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She started to her feet as he asked this, and as he knelt before her he felt her shiver as though she were suddenly exposed to intense cold.

“Violet!” he exclaimed, anxiously, “I do not seek to distress you. But only rest your hand upon my forehead, and I shall know that henceforth I may comfort and protect you.”

Violet listened as he pleaded, while it seemed to him that his heart was throbbing out his life ere she answered.

“Do not send me from you, miserable and hopeless,” he resumed. “Let me know that you will permit me to love you, as indeed I do, with all my heart, and soul, and being—I cannot part with you, Violet, until you have promised one day to be my own.”

It was a strange weird love-making, but feeling so intense as his comes only once in a life-time.

Dead ashes may be re-kindled. But we know something has gone out which can never be called forth the very same again. At length Violet spoke, and it seemed to him that the whole room vibrated with the music of her voice.

"Thank you," she said softly, "thank you, for the devotion and kindness you have shown me, for so long a time, and thank you for the still greater devotion of which you are now telling me. You are my greatest friend, and in your care of me, you have also proved yourself to be the same of my husband. My whole heart's gratitude will always be yours. My desolate world would be still more desolate without your friendship; but let this much content you, while I am away."

"No, Violet," he passionately cried, "a hundred times no. It will not content me—I plead for something dearer than your friendship. Is there no whisper in your heart that some day you will grant it me? God help

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me if there be not. But my darling, do not tremble so."

"Do not tell me of your love, Captain Wyldish, my heart is too full of sorrow to listen to it, and love like yours must be for one over whom the shadows of grief have never yet passed. Come back with me to our old friendship—your pity has made you think that you love me."

"You are needing rest," he promptly answered, "and I must not weary you, or I could tell of suffering that would convince you it is love, not pity, that makes me thus entreat you. I know I am unworthy of the priceless boon for which I crave, but oh, Violet, do not send me away in despair. I will endure any probation if you will but give me hope at the end."

"Violet! Violet!" he repeatedly murmured.

At hisoft petitioning, a yearning rose up, and who can wonder, in her woman's heart, to have something once again on earth upon which to

rest, and which she might call her own ; and as his voice, which had sounded in her ears with truest comfort in her times of greatest need, continued its passionate pleading, her hand fell gently but hesitatingly on his forehead.

“ Again, I thank you,” were her first syllables, and then, as she removed her hand, she added, timidly, as if in interrogation : “ there is no reason why I should not have complied with your request ; yet it seems all so strange to me.”

“ None, my own Violet,” he answered, rapturously ; “ your hand once again, in token of your trust, and my name from your lips, darling.”

Again, the small hand was placed lightly and timidly on his broad forehead, and lingered softly there, but ere she had time to call him by his name, a flash of lightning, fierce and lurid, shot from the heavens and played over his face so that each feature was dis-

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tinctly visible, as he still knelt in an agony of entreaty at her feet.

As the lightning flashed between them, Violet started aside and cried with terror : “ Did you see that lightning ? It came between us,” she continued shudderingly ; “ and it is a bad omen.”

“ It was only summer lightning ; do not be alarmed, dearest,” he returned quickly.

But she was startled, and her nerves were weakened by the events which she had so lately passed through. His words therefore failed to reassure her.

“ It is a bad omen,” she repeated ; “ and seems to tell me to bear my sorrows alone, and that I ought not to have listened to you. It has terrified me frightfully ; and Captain Wyldish—Stanley——”

In another instant, and before he had time to prevent it, she had fallen to the ground. He had heard his name pronounced, ere Violet

fell, and the memory of its wail, as it first came to him, never left him. It was not thus that he had prayed for it—not wrung out by pain and terror that he had hoped to hear it, but even thus it filled him with an indescribable satisfaction and tenderness.

Swiftly, almost, as the lightning had gleamed over the frightened vision of Violet, he procured lights from her writing table, and lifted her in his arms.

As he raised her, she slowly opened her eyes for a moment, and then her head fell heavily back upon his shoulder. The sight of her pale worn face smote him with the knowledge of how inadequate her physical strength had been for the long conversation which he had brought upon her, and he reproached himself bitterly for his thoughtlessness.

“Heaven preserve this treasure to me,” he ejaculated, as he reluctantly relinquished her, while he sought eagerly for her scent-bottle.

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He was loath to part with his light burthen even for this short space of time, loath to summon assistance.

No miser over his gold was ever more greedy than he, lest any should come and take from him the nursing her back to consciousness.

But the deep fringe of her eyelids rested on motionless cheeks, while their marble hue remained unchanged. The spell of passion's breathing brought no colour to her ashen lips. Her innocent ears heeded not the wealth of affection which he was unfolding.

Notwithstanding his loving tendance, animation did not return as he expected. He was growing agitated and nervous, when the sound of some one passing the door told him that other help was at hand, of which Violet's prolonged insensibility made him now only too glad to avail himself.

"Mrs. Vivien is suffering from fatigue and has fainted," he said, overtaking Mrs.

Matingley, ere she had proceeded many steps in another direction.

She returned with him immediately—but without trepidation. A household, experiencing the various causes for distress which were then sweeping over Greyford Hall, is prepared for anything.

It is the first misfortune that bewilders and creates a panic; afterwards the bows are kept bent and minds are ready for emergencies.

Nevertheless, it was with an expression of extreme dismay, that, as she proceeded to untie the ribbon which Violet wore round her throat, she pointed to a stream of blood trickling from her temple and covering the cushion upon which she was lying.

“For mercy’s sake tell me, quickly, what is the matter!” Stanley Wyldish cried frantically. “It is on my hand also. I never noticed it; and I have killed her with my blundering stupidity. Can you tell me where I shall be

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most likely to find the doctor? Was he not to be at the lodge this evening? I will go there. I shall go faster than any one else, and will bring him back with me. Where is Miss Firmstone? and where is Susanne?" he continued impatiently, almost ready to resent their absence, forgetful how anxiously a few minutes before he would have had it prolonged.

"What can I do, Mrs. Matingley? Let us try some brandy," was his next breathless suggestion.

Mrs. Matingley strove to conceal her alarm as she answered by expressing a desire that medical help might be obtained without delay.

Scarcely trusting himself to bestow a glance upon Violet, he turned to execute her injunction and rushed from the house, while a thousand nameless terrors urged him into incredible speed.

## CHAPTER II.

“ My spirit flew in feathers thin.”

THERE was nobody left in town now, at least, nobody who aspired to be thought “ somebody.” All the somebodies had gone somewhere else. Lord Somebody, Lady Somebody, Mr. Somebody, Mrs. Somebody, and the greatest of all somebodies—their servants.

Liveries, carriages, and equestrians, all had vanished. The great houses in the great squares looked as though a never-ending state funeral was going on, and loyalty had run for ever wild. Inside the houses one could only suppose that their owners had converted them into warehouses for the re-

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ception of parcels, no matter how unwieldy in shape and gigantic in size, provided only that they were "whitey brown." There was a perfect atmosphere of brown-holland everywhere.

"Novelties for seaside wear" had made the last expiring effort to swell the already overflowing items that were crippling the quarter's allowance of pin-money of many a fair one. Milliners and modistes had done their best as well as their worst. The much-enduring animals in the "Zoo" were beginning to grow accustomed to the restored peace and quiet of Sunday afternoon.

London was transformed as if by the wand of a magician. Regent Street could be crossed, without terrified haste, by the most nervously constituted old lady. Bond Street was becalmed. Luxurious equipages no longer rolled down it in quick succession, exhibiting the wearers of dainty bonnets, which surrounded daintier faces, with lace around

them, and soft coloured parasols above them.  
Beauty and fashion had departed.

The Harcourts, the Lennoxes, Inah Dallingcourt, all had left town.

And Basil Cranmore was wending his way to the Carpathian Mountains, to fish and to be uncomfortable, and, as he searched for new scenes and adventure, to discover, not how long life might be endured without a bath as large as a lake, but how long it could be endured without one at all. He took with him no more personal luxuries and clothes than he could be weighted with himself. But although he cheerfully contented himself with a valise of the most diminutive proportions, he carried with him a vast possession.

Stowed away with the utmost care in one of its small compartments, was the photograph of Nellie Lennox, and stowed away in the depths of his steadfast heart, he bore with him little Nellie's love. This is a likeness-taking, likeness-giving age, and a love-

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making one also, all of which are often done lightly enough.

But Basil Cranmore and Nellie Lennox were no triflers. In return for that which he carried with him, he had left with her as true a love as man can give to woman. They met frequently since the day on which we heard her chanting his praises to Inah Dallingcourt, and their friendship passed rapidly into a happy wooing.

The Carpathian travel had been decided upon before this turning point in his life revealed itself, and it was the only incident which occasioned the course of their true love not to run quite smoothly. But Mr. and Mrs. Lennox wished Nellie to accompany them to Scotland, and advised Basil to pursue his original intention. He therefore acquiesced in their opinion, while he and Nellie decided, that with their perfect faith in each other, there was nothing very alarming about it after all.

But when the time for parting had come, Nellie cried bitterly, as she laid her face on the shoulder of her lover to hide her tears, while his eyes were almost as liquid as her own, as he kissed her tears away, and whispered fondly that very soon she would be his own, own little wife, when they would go everywhere together. So she choked back her tears, and tried to make the best of it; but she very fairly resembled April weather, while he journeyed in one direction and she in another.

Indeed, she experienced, for the first time, that treasured possessions bring anxiety to the possessor, and that, however smoothly the barque of happiness floats on the sea of life, it creates care which was unknown before.

There was no great sensation caused by the betrothal of Basil and Nellie. Every one said that she was just the sort of girl to be married early, and so they had always said. But there were some envious mammas who

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were heard to wonder that Mr. Lennox should allow his only child to marry a second son.

Nellie drove no one to despair,—disappointed no false hopes by her engagement, and had no packets of old love-letters to sacrifice to her intended husband.

She had been universally liked and admired, and more than one heart had been placed at her disposal. But although the unsuccessful suitors were dismissed, it had been with as little damage to their feelings and self-esteem as possible.

Basil Cranmore had scarcely less to immolate before her than she had before him. He had wasted no vain regrets over broken fans, faded bouquets, and scented gloves ; neither had he any promiscuous locks of hair whereabouts to make a bonfire in her honour.

His offering was that of a whole heart. It was not one which had been given away piece by piece, and then gathered in to be cemented together and presented to her, with the hope that it would not only hold firm,

but that she would never discover the defections of its riven patched condition.

Inah Dallingcourt gave her own expressive shrug of the shoulders when she heard of the intended nuptials, and wrote a somewhat patronizingly congratulatory letter. Nellie was in Scotland when it reached her. She read it good-humouredly, and laughed as she handed it to her mother, and proclaimed it to be "so very like Inah."

Ever since the unfortunate evening when Stanley Wyldish was an absentee, Nellie had felt a delicate reluctance to talk of him to her cousin. For several days afterwards she had peered anxiously around her, whenever they were in public, hoping that she might see his tall figure. But opera, park, balls and concerts, were alike without him, and she had scarcely felt herself sufficiently at home with Basil Cranmore, in this early stage of their engagement, to make many inquiries about him.

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Basil made no secret of his lack of admiration for Inah Dallingcourt, and the sturdy battles which his lady-love fought in her defence, only made him love her the more, without altering his opinions. The Dallingcourts he knew were cousins of the Lennoxes, but he meditated no amount of intimacy between them when his married life should commence.

He and Nellie had never spoken of Stanley Wyldish in conjunction with Inah Dallingcourt.

At the time when Nellie and Basil were mutually sealing the fate of each other, it so happened that Stanley Wyldish had suddenly disappeared.

Nellie, therefore, had no opportunity for estimating the extent of Basil's friendship for him. Her lover had forwarded his letter of hearty good wishes for her to see. It made her like him even more than she did before.

It was very characteristic of him, in

the genial and unhackneyed warmth of its expressions, which, perhaps, had been made all the more earnest by his own surroundings.

We live more for others, when we have passed through great emotions ourselves. Shame on our churlish nature, if it be not so!

Stanley Wyldish was no churl. Neither was the influence of Mrs. Vivien over him, or his love for her, calculated to make him one. None rejoiced more heartily for Basil, on the present occasion, than he.

Nellie was quite a little heroine in her way, while she was in Scotland. Her friends with whom she was staying, had a large family of unmarried daughters, who evinced a never-tiring interest in her engagement. They were all older than she, and the idea of a wedding was, to them, suggestive of everything that was charming and romantic.

Morning after morning, when they were

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alone with her, they inflicted an endless fire of minute inquiries about Basil, his eyes, his hair, his height, what he did, what he said, what he liked, and what he disliked. After having undergone, two or three times over, a strict cross-examination from the eight sisters separately, and the questions still continuing to pour in thick and fast, Nellie grew completely puzzled. Finally, she came to the conclusion, that she must have a remarkably unobserving mind, since upon many of the qualifications about which they interrogated her, she had never bestowed a thought, and really could not tell whether he possessed them or not.

Then they were never tired of hearing how Basil and Nellie first met, and what she thought of him, the very first time he ever spoke to her. As one sister became appeased, the remaining seven took up the ball of curiosity, and tossed it blithely about.

But Nellie stood her ground better upon these latter points. She liked to tell of their pleasant meetings, anticipated, and unexpected, and of the rapid way in which their mutual liking had grown.

Altogether, she went through a great amount of petting.

Mr. and Mrs. Lennox loved their daughter dearly, and now that some one would, in a few months, take her from them to himself, she was more than ever precious in their eyes, and the wedding was anything but a source of looked-for delight to them.

"I am not a bit more sensible, dear mamma, than those two poor Miss Greys were, when they found themselves going to be married," Nellie observed, demurely, to her mother one day, after perusing a budget from Basil Cranmore. "I used to laugh at them unmercifully, for being so sentimental, and now I am every atom as foolish as they were. I want Basil to come back so much,

and I read his letters over and over again, until I am quite ashamed of myself for the waste of time. I think of him, too, until I grow so absent, and do such stupid things. Fancy my calling the dog Carlo, Carpathian, the other day. They have not left off teasing me about it yet. Was it not silly of me, mamma?"

Mrs. Lennox smiled at the frank avowal, and gave a mother's kindly answer.

"I am glad you don't think me foolish enough to disown me," Nellie continued, "but I am more disappointed with myself than I can tell you. I believe, that I meant to imitate the courtiers of King Canute, and to imagine that I possess the same power over the waves of my romance, as those flatterers would have had the wise king believe that he had over those of the sea, and this is the result."

She looked at her finger as she finished speaking, and turned round and round the hoop

of pearls, which told of her betrothal, with evident discomfiture in her mind, at the defeat of her self-appointed line of action.

When we ourselves try to carry out our theories, they become terrible will-o'-the-wisp's, and the tiny god Cupid puts stalwart common-sense continually to confusion.

Nellie was inclined to be visionary and enthusiastic. Her present penitence was by no means uncalled-for, since she was proving herself to be undoubtedly false to the colours which she had before hoisted.

We suspect, however, that, had Basil Cranmore received her confession instead of Mrs. Lennox, the absolution granted would have been equally willing. He was not proving himself to be remarkable for stoical self-command, or sensible conduct, under his present circumstances.

He spent the first few days of his journey in wishing heartily that he had never started. It was a frame of mind not likely to make

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him the most desirable fourth in a travelling expedition.

Having assured himself of the vanity and vexation of this wish, he became frantically embued with another, and his unfortunate friends found themselves doomed to push on at all hazards. "Poste restante," not "Excelsior," was the burthen of his cry, as he impetuously declined to listen to their persuasions for the delight of anything approaching to a halt.

Vain were their hopes that the delirium would subside when the goal was reached.

Another, yet another, loomed in the distance, while the delight afforded by one seemed but to increase his desire for a repetition at the next.

The practical, sober-minded Basil Cranmore had become one of the most erratic of her Majesty's subjects. He was far more astonished at himself, than little Nellie was disappointed at the confusion, which the

sorcery of the “old, old story” had wrought in her proposed philosophy.

They were unfashionably and unconventionally in love with each other, without any extraneous pressure from untoward circumstances.

Like many other engaged people, with hearts in the right place, they were not illustrating their felicity by becoming more shiningly amusing or agreeable.

If Nellie grew tired, in Scotland, at garden-parties and picnics, and no longer cared for dancing, Basil was similarly indifferent to what was going on around him, and wondered, with newly-adopted wisdom, at the amusement which his friends contrived to gain from trifles.

“Oh, dear ; how dreadful it must be to be engaged, and always to look so serious and proper, and to have such long letters to read and to write,” a laughing, madcap little friend of ours confided to us one day, who had just

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been chidden, by her elder and newly-affianced sister, for frivolity and irrelevant remarks.

Six months sped away, and then the bewailer embarked in the same prospective speculation of matrimony, and became the most insatiable peruser of closely-written pages, penned by a masculine hand, that we have ever met with.

Forgetful of her former opinions, she looked with demure contempt, from her pedestal of betrothal, upon the giddy maidens sporting mockingly around her, but for whom we can wish nothing better than that they may bask in the same joy of approved and authorized affection.

Secret attachments for unattainable objects, as delineated in the annals of story-land, are exceedingly romantic and captivating; but, in real life, they have marred more happiness, directly and indirectly, than we care to think of.

But we are not always prone to admit this.

As we are safely ensconced on our own perch, we are apt to smile with snug sarcasm at the weakness of our neighbours.

Ofttimes we fall ere our merriment is ended. There is nothing then to be done, but to pick up our astonished selves, it is to be hoped, the wiser and better, although hustled and crestfallen.

How wicked to wear false hair! ill-nature exclaims, with a mouth full of false teeth; and, although consistent in much, we are most of us inconsistent enough to allow expediency to rule us somewhere.

Nellie Lennox and Basil Cranmore were only proving themselves no wiser than the rest of human beings.

Through it all, however, Basil never lost sight of his deep interest in Stanley Wyldish, and he waited, with considerable anxiety, to learn what moves had been made, during his absence, upon the chess-board which Stanley Wyldish had laid out before himself.

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Altogether, the Carpathian mountains, men and women, fishings and fordings, never have had and never will have, a back turned upon them with a heartier good-will than that of Basil Cranmore as he set his face homeward —to lady-love, Stanley Wyldish, and native land.

## CHAPTER III.

"The tiny trumpeting gnat can break our dream."

RICH wives are particularly useful to most men, but more especially so perhaps to professional men, and of professional men to military men.

It is so much more comfortable to have a full share of the luxuries of what our grandfathers term this luxurious age.

The British soldier must grumble. He is much less likely to do so, however, when his return from parade, or duty, is to a well-ordered, good-sized house, standing in its own grounds at a distance from barracks,

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which suggests that stable and coach-house are alike well filled.

Perhaps some such reflection as this passed through the mind of Lionel Harcourt as he heard the pleasant jingle of bells, as, waiting on the lawn in the front of his house, he watched his wife return from her drive, with her spirited ponies as fresh as when they started.

He was not, and never had been, romantic. The bliss of love in a cottage, and living on the transports of affection, were myths which had never attracted him.

Mrs. Harcourt had lost none of her loveliness, and he was fortunate in having for a wife, one who was high souled and beautiful as well as rich.

But the skeleton lurking in many an outwardly fair establishment, sat grimly in the depth of his heart, and robbed him of the satisfaction which lookers on pronounced must be perfect.

Standing on his own smooth, trimly-cut

turf, with the open doors and windows of his house revealing the elegance of its interior, and with the charming picture which his wife formed before him, why did he not forcibly eject the monster which had enthroned itself within him, and which, with dexter subtle fingers instilled its drop of poison into this and every cup which otherwise would have been so sweet to him ? Why did he not so clip and trim the borders of his discontent, and so smooth his turbulent desires, as, under his directions, had been all outward objects around him ?

Mrs. Harcourt checked her ponies when she saw her husband, and, as soon as she reached him, alighted from her carriage, and expressed her pleasure at finding him so unexpectedly at home.

“I am glad you have returned so early, Lionel,” she exclaimed ; “there is a good hour before I need commence dressing. I wish very much to talk with you. I feel

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that I shall sing all the better to-night if I unburthen my mind. I have heard from Lady Marchmont, and I know that you will be glad to hear, Mrs. Vivien is better."

At the sound of the name of the latter, Lionel Harcourt assumed an attitude of attention.

"I am delighted with the news," he said. "But I cannot allow you to continue walking, as you have been driving a long time this afternoon. Come with me to my den : we are secure from interruption there, while visitors may disturb us here at any moment."

The "den" was simply a half-library, half smoking-room. Lionel Harcourt was not a sportsman, therefore it lacked the usual charms of such retreats. There were no brushes, pads, heads, nor any pictures of young ladies, with faultless seats, and, if possible, more faultless steeds, "taking" that which even on canvas makes us gasp with admiration.

There were no portraits of ruddy com-

plexioned gentlemen, in perfect "tops," and "pink," nor of dear old dogs on which you delight to look, and at the relation of whose deeds of intelligence and prowess you listen in perfect faith.

Neither was Lionel Harcourt literary enough to furnish it with the attractiveness of a well-filled library. However, it was a pleasant nondescript snugger enough, and adorned at least with whips, gloves, cigar stands and boxes. There were some good books, lots of military drawings, and plans of fortifications, with piles of magazines and newspapers.

Mrs. Harcourt seated herself composedly on an easy chair, and taking off her hat, she looked thoughtful, as she deliberately curled and uncurled its drooping feather with the tips of her fingers, before she addressed her husband. There was the old stateliness in her manner as she commenced speaking.

"Lionel, I have lived my secret down, and I am going to tell you all about it. I have

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grown older, and discovered how common are such romances, and that nearly every woman could recount something resembling it. However, the remembrance of my own still cleaves sufficiently to me to make me wish to be of service to my old lover." She paused and then resumed with dignity. "Lionel! I found out while I was nursing Mrs. Vivien, that Captain Wyldish loves her. I have not seen him for years, but Stanley Wyldish gave his boyish love to me. You may well look surprised," she went on quietly, "that I have so continually run the risk of meeting him; but, without being exactly a fatalist, I felt convinced, somehow, that it would never happen. You will understand now why I refused to go to the funeral of poor little May."

"When Mrs. Vivien stayed with us in town, she rarely mentioned him. At that time I was aware that he was paying great attention to Miss Dallingcourt. I knew her by sight and by name, when she visited Malta, before

you arrived there, and I know now that she, and debts incurred by gambling, drove my young lover away. He had never spoken to my father, but he won my love, and confessed his own for me. It has all passed, and I speak of it only because I know you will give me your help for the sake of Mrs. Vivien.

“When I reached Lady Marchmont’s I was quite unprepared to find her so ill. She had a most alarming fainting fit on the evening before she left Greyford Hall. It was brought on, the doctors said, by fatigue and excitement, consequent upon the distress of mind which she had suffered. It came on quite suddenly, and in falling she is supposed to have struck her temple against the sharp carving of a chair near her, so that, in addition to her swoon, she was stunned by the blow. She remained insensible for a length of time, and they were terribly afraid that brain fever would ensue. Although she was

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delirious for a few hours, it was considered better, the next evening, to remove her to the Marchmonts'. Since then she has remained in a state of such perfect listlessness, that she is not able even to read a letter. It is most piteous to see her. The death of her child has crushed her terribly, Lionel. Lady Marchmont is completely distressed about her, and between ourselves, I do not know that it is quite the best place for her to be in. It is too close to all her old interests, while the great age of Lady Marchmont, and the consequent retirement in which they live, scarcely affords sufficient matter to arouse and interest her. I am very glad I went to her, and this brings me back, Lionel, to my reason for this conversation.

“Captain Wyldish was with Mrs. Vivien at the time she was taken ill, and I learnt enough of his terror then, and of his anxiety now, to be sure of the fact, of which I have told you.

"The Dallingcourts were at work in Malta—they are so again, and there are rumours afloat, of which I would not have Mrs. Vivien hear. I wish her to come to us, that I may guard her from being pained by them, and, with your permission, I wish to see Captain Wyldish."

"Without your permission," she added smilingly, "I have already written to consult with Lady Marchmont as to the best method for arranging for the journey of so great an invalid as Mrs. Vivien."

The amazement of Major Harcourt was almost too great for words.

"Why have you never told me this before?" he exclaimed.

"I could not. Indeed, for very long, I thought that I never could. But there is a motive for it now," she continued, looking up at him, with even more than her usual dignity. "There is good to be gained. The description of Mrs. Vivien's sorrow at leaving

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her home is touching in the extreme. The good clergyman, Mr. Matingley, literally carried her downstairs in his arms like a child. Although the hall was thronged with weeping domestics and menials as he bore her through it, she saw none of them. She covered her face with her hand, and, except that he felt her trembling all over, he would scarcely have thought her to have been conscious. It seemed rather a risk to move her just then, but Captain Wyldish had telegraphed in the early morning for a physician, by whose advice it was done. The schoolchildren and poor people from the village had been thronging the park all day, hoping to catch a glimpse of her. The blinds of the carriage, however, were drawn closely down, and therefore they were disappointed. There was scarcely a dry eye amongst them as it drove past. Even Miss Firmstone was seen to shed a tear, and then pull down her gauze veil with a sniff, and a jerk of indignation at

her weakness. The only occasion when Mrs. Vivien spoke, was to ask for Bon-bon. He had bitten nearly everybody's fingers in the house during the twenty-four hours which he had been kept from his mistress. At last he was finally installed by her side, and then he vented the remnant of his anger by growling savagely at Captain Wyldish as he arranged the pillows for her. It is not often that one can be of use and do good, and the good which I now seek to do is, if possible, to prevent any idle gossip about Captain Wyldish from reaching Mrs. Vivien. I have grown very fond of her. She has strength of mind and character which is not discoverable until she is well known. Looking at her, and remembering all that she has endured, it makes me ashamed of the way in which I magnified my early trial. I shall step aside, perhaps, from the ordinary rules of conventionality by seeking for a renewal of my acquaintance with Captain Wyldish,

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but I shall not allow this to deter me. As I said before, one has not often the opportunity for doing good, and I cannot let this go by without doing my best to avert suffering from one already so cruelly tried as Mrs. Vivien. I hope also to benefit Captain Wyldish."

"I must compliment you, my dear wife, upon your rare quality of keeping a secret. As I do so, may I ask in what way you propose to benefit this old adorer of your youthful charms? I perfectly appreciate your desire to have Mrs. Vivien here; but, since it is most improbable that she can be attached to Wyldish, and your old interest for him must of necessity have died out, I confess that I fail to understand your desire to be of service to him. His love for Mrs. Vivien is not likely to affect or be of any concern to her; therefore I should advise that he were left to his fate."

Mrs. Harcourt scrutinizingly regarded her husband as his measured, polished tones met

her ear ; but he continued with the most untroubled composure—

" I did not know that he had been entangled by the Dallingcourts. They are a bad set, take them altogether ; but I think Miss Dallingcourt just the sort of woman he should marry. She is handsome, and has plenty of the sort of ' go ' about her that would just suit him. She has money, too, I conclude. On the other hand, his marriage with Mrs. Vivien would be most imprudent. Her loss of means sufficiently points to this, for Wyldish is extravagant, and not over-wealthy. I need more explanation, therefore, before I can understand your wish to see or benefit him."

There was little of the usual unrestrained confidence of man and wife between Major and Mrs. Harcourt, neither had they ever desired it. The absence of this caused heart-burnings to neither. His somewhat formal speech was answered by her in like manner.

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"I have no more to offer," she said. "My confession is ended. I believe that I have it in my power to be of use to Captain Wyldish. So I mean to be."

Major Harcourt bit his lip. He had no intention that the conversation should thus terminate. He wished rather to gather more, and he said, with something almost approaching to jocularity,

"If my wife means to do anything I know full well that it is already half completed."

But he was frustrated. Mrs. Harcourt simply gave a cold smile in recognition of his remark, and having taken out her watch, she prepared to leave him.

"When do you expect Mrs. Vivien will come to us?" was his detaining query.

"Next week I hope," answered Mrs. Harcourt. "But it must depend on the rapidity with which she recovers. Lady Marchmont

will let me hear of her progress. I see I guessed rightly, and that you have no objection to this part of my plan."

"I can have no objection to any part of it, where so much kindness is intended," he returned. "I only sought for more particular information."

But the answer was a half truth only. The speaker felt himself baffled as he made it. He had unexpectedly gathered some information upon subjects of exciting interest.

The weapon which he had acquired, however, was neither ponderous enough nor sufficiently dangerous to be wielded at present. He hoped by patient investigation to increase its proportions, while he trusted to the whetstone of scandal for its sharpening.

In his replies to his wife his usual diplomacy had deserted him.

The coldness of his disposition rendered

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him habitually clear-headed and long-sighted, but he had lost this coldness in the heat of dislike to Stanley Wyldish, and in the warmth of a reprehensible infatuation for Violet.

## CHAPTER IV.

“Friends who insist on play or pay.”

Not many days before Major and Mrs. Harcourt had thus conversed, our hero was made the subject of another discussion elsewhere.

May good fortune defend us from being brought before a tribunal composed of our most intimate friends !

Stanley Wyldish had little chance of mercy in this second instance. Those who sat in council were brother and sister, and the court of inquiry was held within the domestic region of the house of their father.

“Wyldish has been here continually during

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the past month, Inah," was the opening speech of George Dallingcourt. He waited for the reply of his sister, but as none was forthcoming he resumed, with no small degree of acrimony—"That servant of his tells lies better than any rogue to whom I ever listened. He copies his master, I suspect. I am awfully savage at having been done in this manner."

"In what, may I ask, has the being done consisted?" retorted Inah, with a considerable amount of asperity. A flush of irritation mounted to her brow, as she continued with petulant warmth—

"I conclude that he gave orders for no one to be admitted, and forgot to exempt you. I see nothing in the fact that need cause you to ruffle your feathers so tremendously."

"Forgot!" was the jeering reply. "Not he—there are divers reasons why he should not wish to see me. I was not to be done, however, this morning, and I caught

him at last. His delight at seeing my physiognomy did not appear any more remarkable, than the anxiety which he has evinced to come here and see yours. I advise you to look ahead. That everlasting woman has got hold of him again, and he has been rushing backwards and forwards about some trumpery law business of hers. I hear that she has killed her baby now. It was her husband last time. Wyldish looks as solemn over it as if no other woman ever lost her husband and child before. I would lay any money that she does it on purpose to decoy him to go to her. He pretends to some awful humbug or other, about promises to take charge of her ; and an idiotic amount of affection for her husband.

“ We might have coined money if he had kept here, and now he coolly talks of going away again immediately. I will stop him, however, if I have to invoke the help of the

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myrmidons of the law. I hold a document of his, which, if put in force, would considerably clip his wings, and render these constant flittings, to attend to all this rubbish for Mrs. Vivien, rather inconvenient. He has let me in pretty heavily, I assure you."

Inah replied disdainfully. "I expect you have let in Captain Wyldish quite as heavily, and much more often than he has you. I do not believe he cares for gambling and betting as you try to persuade me that he does."

"You have made a wonderful discovery, Inah," George Dallingcourt retorted. "Unfortunately it is not a very valuable one, since others have made it before you. I lost five and twenty pounds, just before the last time he went away, in a bet with Ander-ton that I would make him join us one evening, when we had a pretty considerable sum of money on the table. He was as obstinate as a mule, however, and I got nothing from him, but an imprecation for my

entreaties, and I lost my money into the bargain."

"And your temper with your money, I expect," Inah carelessly remarked. After which she remained absorbed in thought for a few moments, and then asked quietly: "What do you mean about this document, which you say that Captain Wyldish has given you?"

George Dallingcourt whistled with provoking superciliousness before he said:—

"Only this, my dear sister: that a small strip of paper, with his signature affixed, will, in all probability, cause him some tribulation before his sojourn upon earth becomes much longer protracted. I do not wish to quarrel with the man for your sake, although you have not managed him well. I have given you loads of chances of seeing him. If you are wise, you will stop him from going away now. You will do me a good turn, as well as yourself. So stop him, Inah!"

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“Stop him!” echoed Inah, repeating the parting words of her brother, as he left the room. “Stop Stanley Wyldish, when he is bent upon doing anything! Keep him here! How? My boasted beauty will not, neither will my anger. I have proved the powerlessness of both. I have tightened the reins, but he has turned aside—I have held them loosely, but he has run away. There is one trial which I have not yet made. I know, if you touch the spring of that which he thinks concerns his honour, that he winces like a stupid boy. I have seen him pass his hand across his brow, and shake back his head in silent scorn, when others have derided the question of a man’s honour before him. I will shew him that he has entangled his honour. He can scarcely retract a second time.

“I am sick of hearing about this Mrs. Vivien, and her chapter of disasters,” she further soliloquized angrily. “It is im-

possible, however, that Captain Wyldish can care for a woman, broken down as she is in health and fortune, while her beauty, if she ever possessed any, is, doubtless, all faded. He is the last man to attach himself to a person of that description.

“The transactions of which George has just told me are, I imagine, the danger signals, which warn him from me. My brother, therefore, has only himself to thank for the consequent diminution of my power.”

The look of perturbation which she wore, as she thus ruminated, belied the consolation of the last idea.

## CHAPTER V.

“ She says, ‘tis love hath bribed her to this deed.”

WE left Stanley Wyldish speeding fleetly with anguish and dismay of heart to obtain assistance for the recovery of Violet.

The prize which he longed with such earnestness to secure had been almost within his grasp.

But at the very moment when success appeared to be smiling upon him, it had been wrested from his eager hand.

We find him now alone, spiritless and dejected, in the soldier home of which he has spoken with so much dislike.

It is nearly ten o'clock : wax lights are burning on the mantel-piece, and upon the table. He is seated by the latter, which is strewn with papers of various descriptions, while lists of figures, on numerous stray slips, show that monetary calculations have been occupying him. But not exclusively. There are letters also, and one, which is stamped and sealed, bears the name of Mrs. Vivien. There is little in the letter ; it has cost him painful self denial to write so little ; but, with so much to say, it was all that he could venture to write. It was a request to be permitted to see her, if she were well enough for the interview. His head and heart were alike aching. Filled with many a weary thought, he did not hear a slight knock which had sounded several times at the door. At last it attracted his attention, and at his somewhat gruffly given words of "come in," a female figure, closely veiled and cloaked, entered. He had not cared sufficiently whom the

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intruder might be to look round, but the footfall was so light that its want of sound aroused him. As he turned, the figure quickly dropped the long dark wrap which enveloped it, and Inah Dallingcourt in all her beauty stood before him.

“Good heavens! Miss Dallingcourt,” he exclaimed, starting to his feet, “what has induced you to come here? It is indeed an unexpected honour, but let me take you back again at once.”

No apparition could have startled and bewildered him more.

Inah Dallingcourt raised her head, which had been a little drooping when she first confronted him, and tossed it back proudly as she said, “You need not take me back, Captain Wyldish; I came without your escort, and I can return without it. But before I go, I will tell you why I have come. It is not often that a woman tells her love unasked—not often that she braves the censure of the world to serve a man who is

apparently regardless of her. I will do both to-night : you are in trouble, and I can save you. Do you know this ?" and she held before his astonished eyes the paper which her brother had so tauntingly spoken of in the morning. " See," she continued. " It has your name upon it, and I have stolen it from my brother, and bribed his servant to bring me here, that I might give it to you. *Stolen* it," she repeated, " and because I love you."

It is not easy to conceive a more beautiful picture than Inah Dallingcourt, as she uttered this. In evening dress as she had left the dinner table, her brilliantly white arms and shoulders bare, her cheeks glowing with excitement, and her eyes full of a passionate tenderness, not often lurking in them. She paused, then moved a few paces nearer to him, still holding the paper towards him.

" I cannot take it, Miss Dallingcourt. With so much to thank you for, would to God you had not done this for me."

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"Say, rather," she made answer emphatically, "'Would to God we had never seen each other.' It is what I have often thought, even when your outward devotion has been the greatest, because I knew that the morrow would bring a reverse. By what right"—and she raised her voice scornfully—"have you, by open word and deed, this second time, so acted that our names have been coupled together by the idle world until I hate the sound of them. Yet you have cared for me, you cannot be quite false and hollow—cannot have feigned it all. If I had thought so I could not have come to you to-night. Have you altogether changed in the last few weeks, and forgotten me; or do I guess rightly that pecuniary embarrassments have kept you from me?"

It was no slight thing for a young, ardent, impulsive man to hear himself so addressed by a lovely woman, and cowardice quickly suggested to him the adoption of the idea,

with which she had supplied him, and under which he might shelter himself.

As a sense of awe sometimes steals over a reveller, who has just left some splendidly illuminated festal hall, while gazing at the loftiness and calm serenity of the pure pale stars shining over him, so did the image of Violet rise to the memory of Stanley Wyldish in contrast to the dazzling beauty before him.

It was a memory which kept guard, as with a drawn sword, between him and the temptation which was so bewitchingly before him.

" You are too kind, Miss Dallingcourt," he began, earnestly, " in bestowing a passing thought upon one so abject as myself. I deserve any reproach which you may give me—any contempt that you may pour upon me. Believe me, your contempt, however great it may be, cannot equal my own. Tell me what reparation I can offer, and how put

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an end to the annoyance which I have thoughtlessly brought upon you."

"‘Reparation’ carries a mocking insult in its tone," she replied, haughtily; then, changing her manner rapidly to one that was almost beseeching, she continued, "Reparation, Captain Wyldish, for a heart that might have known softer, better things. A heart which has been drawn out of itself to appreciate them, and then thrown back again to beat itself against the hardness of the world until it is more proud, more selfish, and more frivolous than before."

"Still I would seek to make it," he mournfully ejaculated, "you would be less severe if you knew all."

As he spoke the timepiece on his cabinet chimed out the hour. Inah started.

"I must go, but I will not take this paper back with me. I have perilled much to obtain it, and I know it will be useful to you.

None will guess where it has gone—why not do as I ask?"

"You would not have me take it, Miss Dallingcourt, if you understood these things better, but your goodness to me this night will never be forgotten. Is there no way in which you will allow me to prove my gratitude. Should you ever need a trusted friend leave me the assurance that you will consider me one, and turn to me."

She glanced up sadly, yet half-defiantly, and then said passionately : "Turn to you! Would you turn to the dog who had bitten you, and ask him to protect you? Would you, in direct thirst, quaff the draught you knew would poison you? Would you walk blind-folded through the longest and darkest tunnels in the world, when swiftest trains were whirling through it? So soon would I turn to you, Stanley Wyldish, in my need for friendship."

"You have a right perhaps to despise

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me thus," he said, "I make no attempt at self-justification, but I beseech you to believe in the sincerity of my regret."

"Sincerity is foreign enough to the flattery of those by whom I am usually surrounded, and I know now that it is as foreign to your nature," she angrily returned, "as to theirs: but you are not responsible perhaps for the foolishness that made me deem you different. However, I have put it aside this night, and no eloquence of yours can ever call it forth again. In the future that lies before us both, should strange stories reach you concerning me, do not join in the general censure, but blame your own handiwork, remembering that I was not always heartless. The life of a beauty is often a hollow one. My vanity has made that of my own doubly so, but I return to it, while the only regret in my heart as I do so, is, that I ever lifted the veil which made me wish to pass from it. You owe me something, however, Captain Wyldish. Tell

me who has stolen between us, as I again remind you to have said, that I had done between you and your honour at Malta. Has she braved anything for you? Will her love heal the hurt done to that honour now, or the injury to my pride?"

Stanley Wyldish regarded her sadly as he rejoined evasively :

" Nothing can ever heal my sorrow for the past, Miss Dallingcourt. I am pained beyond measure to have incurred your displeasure. Forgive me, and allow me, once more, to express my gratitude for that which you have sought to do for me to-night."

" You talk of reparation, sincerity, and gratitude, what are they to me?" she inquired contemptuously; " or what trust should I have in them from you; but," she added imperiously, " before I leave, tell me whether report speaks truly, when it says that you love another. I do not choose to

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ask a question twice, and to remain unanswered."

There was a pause for a few moments, and then he said, slowly, and with effort :

" I may not compromise one to whom, perchance, I am little more than the birds which, in her sweet charity, she feeds with crumbs on winter's early morn, neither may I disobey your command. Yet, my presumption seems beyond the hope of forgiveness when I admit that, with all my unbounded regard for you, report has not erred in this instance."

" Enough, Captain Wyldish, I am satisfied. Inah Dallingcourt for the first time has heard a rival openly preferred before her, and," she exclaimed passionately, " I hate her, whoever she may be, and if a woman can curse, I curse her."

" No ! no ! Miss Dallingcourt, not her. Let me not bring a curse upon her. I have

been doubly a traitor, and weak to vileness, but she is innocent of all idea of rivalry, as the flowers you wear—curse me if you will,” he added, sorrowfully.

“ If doing so would harm her, perhaps I might ; but I came not hither to curse you.” And she advanced to him as she finished speaking, and resting her hand on his arm she looked up at him steadily and in silence for a moment, and then continued. “ Good-bye, Captain Wyldish; for you I would have encountered any ill the world has power to give. Go back to the idol you have erected for yourself and paraded before me.”

“ Not paraded,” he broke in. “ God knows I did not do that. I sought only to comply with your request. Do not add to my torture by this thought.”

“ Nevertheless,” she continued; “my torture is unheeded. It is not the bitterness which wrung the wish to curse from me that touched you, but only the fear that its vengeance

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should fall on her, this loved one. Think you that I did not hear her innocence compared with the flowers in my bosom, or that with the protestation I noted not your quick terror for her. Go back to her, I say, and when your heart is beating with the happiness of her presence, remember this night, and warn her to beware of Inah Dallingcourt. So surely as I burn this paper, regardless of all consequence, so surely will I cause woe to the woman by whom and through whom I have endured this."

In an instant the paper lay in ashes at her feet. Then stooping, she lifted from the ground the cloak she had worn upon entering, and having wound it around her, passed from him.

Stanley Wyldish turned to follow her, but she waved him back with a lofty gesture of denial.

## CHAPTER VI.

"Life is real ! Life is earnest !"

SOME of the last few sentences which Inah Dallingcourt had uttered, drove the iron deep into the soul of Stanley Wyldish.

To know that Violet was clinging to him, and to none other, for protection, was his fondest wish.

Therefore to hear her threatened, quenched the regretful tenderness with which he had been listening to the reproaches of the beautiful upbraider, and wrought the desire into a greater intensity.

A perplexed man nearly always flies, in

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his perplexity, to the resource of thrusting his hands into the depths of his pockets.

Stanley Wyldish desisted from his half-meditated pursuit of the figure which, as it vanished, appeared to him to be rather a vision than a reality, and few men have ever been more perplexed than he, as he did so.

The plunge which he made therefore into the before-mentioned resources was with corresponding vigour. But the solution to his difficulties was not lying perdu therein.

If he could have assured himself that Inah Dallingcourt was under safe escort, some of his bewilderment would have been assuaged. He left his room, therefore, and having reached the open air peered round him with solicitude. But she was invisible. In his desire for her safety he would almost have invoked her return. He followed, therefore, in her wake until he reached the place which

he knew to be her appointed destination.

There was no trace, however, of her presence. Retracing his steps, with something like relief he launched into bitter invectives, of which, it were needless to say, unlucky luck obtained a large share.

Unlucky luck, when you are unlucky !  
What abuse you meet with, and what an astounding amount of wrong-doings your shoulders are called upon to bear.

Thus our hero eased himself from some of his own load, and considered himself to be, not only the most unlucky of mortal men, but also the most outraged by luck, since his actions had borne fruition.

That which he had planted had grown and blossomed out of the season in which its luxuriant profusion could afford him pleasure, and therefore was to be resented for having taken root at all.

With many shortcomings, however, Stanley

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Wyldish was devoid of the detestable baseness which would have blamed Inah Dallingcourt for the passion which he knew, only too well, he had done much to awaken.

Too chivalrous and generous for that, he yet sought extenuation from circumstances as he walked rapidly back to his room.

The teaching of the solitude of those weeks at Greyford Hall, and the remembrance of that last evening there, speedily, however, put the endeavour to flight.

He no longer buried his head in the mire of bitterness. But, "holding fast" in the strength which that remembrance gave him, he acknowledged that the pebble which had been hurled into the fair stream of his existence, and which had created the circlet of difficulties that had ever since been widening around him, had been cast by his own hand. He had woven the network by which his progression was impeded, and he foresaw

that this visit from Inah Dallingcourt would tighten its intricacies.

If his busy brain ached before her appearance, it throbbed with a heavier pain now. Remorseful memories lashed him as he clung to the only rudder which could bring him safely to the haven he desired, until a mighty battle ensued.

Pacing the room, according to his custom when excited, his old impetuosity partially regained its sway.

At one instant dragging his portmanteau towards him, he flung a few articles of wearing apparel hastily into it ; and the next, kicked it away savagely.

Burning, as he began the semblance of packing, to rush from the reach of Dallingcourts, duns, and importunities of all kinds, and then stayed his preparations, as the thought spell-bound him that, in going away, he would be fleeing from Violet.

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Idle tales—with the truth which might be in them distorted and magnified—would of a certainty reach her in his absence, which absence, he comprehended, would seem to give validity to the slanders.

He opened drawer after drawer, and closed them again with a sharp, impatient push. He tightened his dressing-case strap, piled some writing materials confusedly together, and then left them. Sticks and whips were taken from their racks, but only to be flung upon the nearest chair, or upon the floor, as his resolution wavered from one point to another.

But an anchor was at hand. Through that wild evening, upturned, although partly hidden, lay the letter which he had written to Violet before the entrance of Inah.

In his eager gleanings for necessaries for his half-intended flight, he disclosed it fully, and it caught his eye. Sweet sounds, as of distant chimes, made melody in his heart.

The recollection of one word, pronounced once only, spread its wings softly over his distracted mind, and nestled fearlessly with him.

Buttoning his coat tightly around him, he again stepped forth into the silent night, bearing the letter in his hand.

No twinkling glowworm, under darkest hedge, ever shone brighter than the light which he saw beam over his labyrinth of despair, as he carried those few short lines to post them.

Violet should decide his fate. By every link and tie of honour—by the constraining ones of an all-absorbing love, and by the restraining one of a promise given to the dead—he would stand his ground meanwhile.

For once, duty and inclination were combined, and Stanley Wyldish did not err in judgment.

He had offered his life to her, and he

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awaited still, either her acceptance, or rejection of the offer.

He had been debarred from seeking his sentence by the illness of Violet, and had been forced to content himself with that which, at present, was but the timid, gentle touch of a small "vanished hand," and "the sound of a voice" breathing his name.

On he strode, in the midnight, grasping the letter firmly, with all a lover's eagerness for the meeting quickening his pace. The passion-stirred being who had stood before him was forgotten, together with the troubles which encompassed him.

He would "keep the bridge," the keeping of which should save his future from ruin. He would plunge into the ocean of probation and patience, and, breasting all obstacles, swim gallantly to shore if assured of Violet's love and Violet's pardon. If these were re-

fused, he must sink, or act the dastard's part and flee.

The passive paper which he held, was the medium from which the decree would issue.

A few more hours must glide by, a few marks be stamped on its white shining cover, and, ere long, fingers which had been laid powerless by sickness and sorrow, but yet holding his life's weal at their pleasure, would take it to themselves.

He sent it forth, therefore, in the darkness, and laid his heart and his will alike prostrate before Violet. Thus he placed, as many a man has done before him, his destiny and the responsibility of it in the hand of a woman.

Well may she falter as she accepts the gift of love which will prove her to be either his good or evil genius—the angel who shall beckon him to a life of purity, in which all manly virtue will grow strong and lusty; or

the woman only whose careless shallowness will make her but the petted plaything of sunny days—a traveller with him, for a life aimless and objectless.

## CHAPTER VII.

“ My heart hath its love.”

THE note which Stanley Wyldish sent on its errand with such feverish anxiety, was not destined to meet with an early reply, while a part of the kind arrangements which Mrs. Harcourt desired to carry out was also doomed to postponement.

Violet was too seriously ill, either to answer the note, or to be removed from Lady Marchmont’s. Her increasing weakness rung out a warning, to which it was impossible to keep closed eyes; and the extreme alarm which Stanley Wyldish experienced was not without foundation.

But happily, after a few weeks of careful attention, the more alarming symptoms disappeared, and an increase of strength speedily followed. A change of air having been recommended, before long Mrs. Harcourt gladly received her.

It seemed well for Violet that she had chosen this destination rather than any other. The world, which had already been busy with the name of Stanley Wyldish, was more so now. It was not the ordinary newspaper world, but that part of it which was most likely to come in contact with Violet.

As he had foreseen, the nocturnal visit, which Inah Dallingcourt had paid him, was productive of much evil.

Foiled in her purpose, she had betrayed it in her wrath to her brother, and it had oozed out quickly beyond the precincts of her family circle. Discussions and scandals were born of it, too numerous to relate.

Party spirit ran high, and while all women

blamed Inah, Stanley Wyldish met with considerable censure from those of his own sex. A hundred improbable versions were given of the fact, and the story grew, both in bulk and colouring, daily.

Inah cared little either for praise or blame. Her beauty was undiminished, and her admirers more numerous.

There are a certain set of men who court notoriety, in any form, and who follow it assiduously. To such as these, the escapade in which Inah had indulged, gave her additional attraction.

George Dallingcourt and Stanley Wyldish encountered each other in a fierce reckoning. The taunt of the destroyed bond fell to the ground. It was met not only by an apology for its destruction, but by an acknowledgement of its validity, and in addition a disbursement, which was much more to the purpose of the taunter.

But for this Stanley Wyldish had little

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credit. The general belief being that he had laughed in the face of George Dallingcourt, and had bid him take “better care of his papers, and of his sister in future.”

The feud between the two men had undoubtedly run high, and the Dallingcourts were still vowing vengeance against Stanley Wyldish, who could not, however, forget the intended generosity of Inah, and the affection which she had displayed for him. It palsied his tongue when he would have asserted his vindication, and it slaked his anger against her relatives. Moreover, he knew the retribution to be a just one. He saw this in the purifying light which was stealing into his soul, from his adoration for Violet.

The lesson of caution, however, was one which Stanley Wyldish was slow to adopt. Therefore, he took no pains to check any of the other calumnies, which speedily became interwoven with the reports concerning Inah and himself.

He felt at bay with the world, but he made no attempt at defence. There was one evil only which he dreaded. If that did not overtake him, nothing he thought could harm him, while, if it did, an earthquake of malice would not render the ruin of his palace of felicity more complete.

The idea that these slanders might be wafted to Violet never dawned upon him.

In conjunction with his natural want of forethought, and with his utter abandonment of the aid of accessories to help him to defy the malignity which assailed him, was the charmed halo with which he encircled Violet. He could contemplate the penetration of neither the muttering of maliciousness, nor the enactment of perfidy within the magic of its guilelessness. Unfortunately, however, there is no atmosphere of innocence upon earth, with which evil passions will not seek to mingle.

Mrs. Harcourt had made the occasion of

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Violet's sickness an opportunity for re-introducing herself to Stanley Wyldish. It was simply done by means of the information which it fell to her lot to convey to him, that, for the present, Mrs. Vivien was unequal to the task of correspondence. Violet was now with her, and she generously determined to be the shield, which should render her secure from the stray shots, from the fire of the enemies of Stanley Wyldish, which were glancing around.

But Margaret Harcourt, with all her vigilance, did not guard against the deadly shaft, which was so closely levelled that its aim could scarcely err. The foe that lurked in ambush was totally unsuspected, and the work of undermining went on steadily, until the citadel of refuge became converted into one of destruction.

## CHAPTER VIII.

"But a lie which is part a truth is a harder matter to fight."

NOVEMBER had arrived, with the gloom of its short misty days, before Stanley Wyldish received the summons, which he hailed with rapture, for the long-looked-for meeting with Violet.

Not one glimpse had been vouchsafed to him of her whom he loved so tenderly, since that last eventful evening at Greyford Hall. On the morning succeeding it, as Mr. Matingley placed Violet in the carriage which was to convey her to Lady Marchmont's, Stanley Wyldish yearned to kiss

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the trembling fingers which concealed her face, and to tell her of his watchful presence. But this could not be. He lingered over the adjustment of the pillows as long as possible, and then the closed door of the carriage shut her from him.

How much had happened since then ! How many intervening days had been fraught with sorrow and trial, and how thickly had uncertainty and dread overshadowed him ! But the time, which his impatience deemed to be so slowly moving, had ceased. The long anticipated day had come, and with it a buoyancy of spirit to Stanley Wyldish, which sent him rejoicing on his way.

Hope soared gently with delight at the expiration of his banishment, while the roseate hue of love tipped with brightness the over-hanging incertitude of the result of his confession.

Violet looked for his arrival with pleasure. There are not many more pleasant things in

life, than the coming of one who is dear to us, no matter from what cause or tie.

Mrs. Harcourt had been obliged to leave home for a few hours in the early part of the day, and had left Violet with strict injunctions not to move from the sofa until she returned. She promised obedience, and then leant back her head with a dreamy air of content.

Books and other resources were placed within her reach, but she did not appear inclined to avail herself of any. She maintained her reclining position, while an occasional upturned glance told that her reflections were not of earthly re-unions alone.

At length Lionel Harcourt entered. As he did so she attempted to rise, but he prevented it immediately, by telling her that his wife had constituted him her gaoler, and that therefore he was responsible for her well-being as well as safety. He had only intruded himself, he proceeded to explain, in

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order to relieve the monotony of her imprisonment.

So her head fell gently back, and she resumed her former attitude, while the same half-abstracted smile played over her features —a smile which, rising after the pitiless storms that had beaten over her, seemed as a rainbow of promise in the horizon of her future. No reflection of its soft brightness, however, could be traced upon the stern features of Lionel Harcourt. But from it appeared to emanate the overcasting gloom which had settled over them, and the gleam of passion and of purpose which they suddenly revealed.

Without recognizing the import of this lowering haze, Violet desired to shelter herself from it. She wished that Mrs. Harcourt would return, and that some accident would arise to afford her an excuse for leaving him, or that he would restore her to her solitude.

Lionel Harcourt noticed the agitation

which was pourtrayed in her downcast eyes, and in the gravity and anxiety depicted on her face. He marked also the transient smile die away, and the rapid searching glance, which she threw around the room, resembling that of a frightened, newly captured bird, crouching down and looking wistfully around its prison wires for an opening through which to fly away. But he allowed it to be of little consequence to him. He had waited long and patiently for the conversation which he now designed to hold, and he was determined not to be baffled.

Violet had no chance of rescue. He had planned his time too well. He knew that Stanley Wyldish was hourly drawing nearer, and he knew also that her smile of welcome had already been given to him in happy anticipation.

That which he desired to accomplish must therefore be commenced quickly. No relenting thought softened his determination.

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Meanwhile Violet could not account for her increasing sensation of disquietude.

Those upturned glances, however, had brought her strength before she felt its need. She was braver than she imagined. Her heart did not utterly fail her, although undefined fear is the most difficult to subdue.

Many ordinary commonplace subjects were discussed between them, while he still regarded her as steadily, as if his piercing gaze would penetrate her inmost thoughts, and as it did so, reveal to her something which dwelt in his own. As Violet strove to rally her scattered courage, she spoke to him lightly and playfully, but her voice rose and fell like the gentle breeze, as it murmurs amid the long grass and leafy trees before coming rain.

Lionel Harcourt knew that he was ruthlessly intending to destroy her light of satisfaction and pleasure, and he understood that some knowledge of his long pent

up, but now unrestrained passion was forcing itself upon her mind.

This knowledge he was only too painfully aware would bring distress with it. He had always known that it must be thus, and he read its confirmation distinctly now.

Nevertheless, had she attempted to leave him, he would almost have forced her to listen to the history of a love which he had prepared with a preface of friendly warning.

It required some diplomacy and dexterity, however, to make the fragmentary conversation bear upon Stanley Wyldish.

Violet was not one who permitted her private affairs to be intruded upon, and therefore it had to be accomplished carefully. The thin end of the dangerous wedge was at length skilfully inserted. The hour of arrival, the quickest route, and the weather for the journey of the traveller opened the way, by degrees, for the carrying out of his intention.

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It was a damp foggy day. The rain fell lazily, and as Violet averted her face from that of her companion, she watched the drops as, one after another, they chased each other down the window pane, until in confluence they trickled with increased speed in their downward course.

In the pauses of his speech, she wondered why he did not leave her, and what he was going to say next.

“ Wyldish is a strange anomaly,” was his first most pointed remark.

This was followed by another equally so.

“ Miss Dallingcourt has plenty of spirit, but it is unfortunate that she does not also possess more caution. She has played a bold game, but the stake for which she hazarded so much, I suspect is of doubtful value. Your sex is often more generous than wise I think, Mrs. Vivien; and Miss Dallingcourt has illustrated my opinion. She would have done better, had she refrained from so

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dauntlessly offering this assistance to Wyldish.  
You do not know her, I think?"

"I have often heard her name, but have never seen her," Violet replied. "I feel quite sure, however," she added, "that Captain Wyldish is as little likely to have required assistance at the hands of a lady, as she, in all probability, is to have been wishful to afford it."

"You have not heard the history?" he interrogated promptly. "It is quite a romance I assure you, and when Wyldish, and the now beautiful Miss Dallingcourt, are gray-headed and decrepid, they will doubtless record it, although with modifications, to their blooming grand-children. Have you not heard of her nocturnal visit to him, and of the stolen bond, which she carried with her other attractions to lay at his feet, or of his gambling debts, and the wrath of George Dallingcourt? But it is a long story, and I am spoiling its interest by this disjointed re-

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lation. You must surely be acquainted with it——”

To this remark, which was made with well-feigned carelessness, Violet replied, coldly.

“ I am acquainted with none of it—with nothing indeed tending so much to the disadvantage of my greatest friend, and I scarcely consider the action to be a worthy one, which brings idle scandal of him to me. Neither do I know of anything which should place the name of Miss Dallingcourt thus in conjunction with his ; but I have long tested his unselfish truth and goodness, therefore it would be an insult to him, for me to attempt his vindication, since I feel sure that he is free from blame.”

“ Nevertheless, Mrs. Vivien, truth grows out of falsehood, and falsehood out of truth. There is nothing wholly true in life, and what I have told you of Wyldish, in comparison with your own experience of him, simply proves the anomaly of his nature to

which I pointed. It is an ordinary circumstance, and one that need not distress you."

"To hear evil of another, must always distress me, Major Harcourt," she answered; "but forgive me for saying that, in this instance, I do not credit a syllable of it."

She raised herself from her recumbent position as she finished speaking, while the scorn and indignation of her manner astonished her companion. Their eyes met, and again hers fell before his.

Drawing a chair towards her sofa, he seated himself close beside her, and continued with a persuasiveness which veiled his cruel purpose.

"There is no peculiarity in some of the facts which I have mentioned. Fortune is ever a fickle mistress, and, with longer wooing, will doubtless smile again upon Wyldish. He has deserted her table, and at times forsworn her orgies, and then presented himself again as a suitor for her

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favours. Unlike Miss Dallingcourt, she has resented his infidelity, to his undoing. One who would be a successful gamester must not thus play fast and loose. Betting and gambling are becoming sciences. My wife tells me that Wyldish has been singularly unfortunate. She had the information from his own lips, therefore the statement is correct."

"Mrs. Harcourt!"

Violet could not restrain this exclamation. Had all the world, she thought, grown mad or false! Mrs. Harcourt, who had spoken a hundred times to her of Captain Wyldish and of his arrival, and yet who had never even hinted that she knew him!

The blow was a steady one, and its shock was heavy. Nevertheless, it met with a stout resistance.

After her exclamation, which conveyed her unbounded surprise at what she had just learnt, Violet continued,

"We will discuss this matter no longer, Major Harcourt. Your wife and I will pursue it. If this be true, falsehood is indeed growing out of truth."

"If this be true!" he echoed gravely. "I should scarcely have asserted it were it not so. This letter will perhaps convince you. Nay, look at it," he ejaculated, as she turned away her head, "since you doubt my word."

"And for what reason do you wish to tell me that which Mrs. Harcourt and Captain Wyldish have kept hidden from me?" Violet inquired, putting aside as she did so the letter which he had requested her to look at. "It is wrong to them, and unkind to me. I have reasons, of which you know not, for disbelieving, at any rate, part of your assertion. Without them, I should do so as strongly."

"You are a staunch advocate, Mrs. Vivien," Lionel Harcourt replied bitterly. "I would that I could assure myself that friendship

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only impels your determined defence of one of those who are absent. Again and again he has stood between me and the place in your estimation which I have ever coveted. So long as I thought him worthy of it, I bén low, and submitted to being set aside. But he is not. If I have tracked him, in the maze of his heedlessness, with the eye of hatred, still I would have acknowledged him to be deserving of your faith, had I found him to be so. But his truth, in which you are trusting, is a thing which long since ceased to exist. I do not consider that he is a safe person for one so young and so lovely as you to confide in. Therefore, at the risk of your anger, I have ventured to speak of him to you. It is time that he were unmasked, and it is for your good. If I fail in my attempt, and you inflict your displeasure upon me, I shall suffer patiently, knowing that if my suffering comes from you, it is likewise for you."

He paused, but before Violet could speak he resumed—

“ My wife has seen him more than once lately. Shall I say more? Shall I tell you how successfully you have been blinded, and how this coming of his has been arranged between them? Before long he will present himself, and perhaps offer to you his love. Would you bid me be silent, while the woman who is dearer to me than life or fame is being deceived? Her love gained, it may be, but to wither as miserably as her misplaced confidence.”

“ This is insult, Major Harcourt!” interrupted Violet, indignantly. “ You have done your worst, therefore leave me. I shall remain here till the return of Mrs. Harcourt, and seek an explanation of that which at present appears involved in mystery.”

“ So full of trust in others!” he exclaimed. “ What have I done, Mrs. Vivien, to merit such utter disbelief at your hands? In com-

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mon courtesy, accept my asseveration. It is made to serve you. At least believe my word."

She listened more calmly, and then, passing her hand wearily across her forehead as she spoke, said—

"It must be a calumny of the basest kind which has misled you. I am partaking of your hospitality, and would willingly believe that you have been misinformed and are mistaken. You are doubly mistaken," she continued, "in presuming to speak thus to me. I do not fear treachery from those in whom I have trusted. May I request again that you will leave me to await Mrs. Harcourt's return."

"Leave you, Mrs. Vivien! Years ago I left you. Young and strong, with reinstated health, I left you. I forsook the land which had renewed my vigour, and for one against which all warned me. I left you without revealing that which I will withhold from you no longer. As I left you, I prayed that

the distance which I was going to put between us might remove your image as far from my memory, and as effectually as it must my coming to your presence. I suppose that I did not pray aright, for the farther I travelled, the more constantly were you present to my memory ; and then I gave up my supplication, and in imagination passed my life with you. I had done all that I could. I had severed myself from home and country, in contempt at my own weakness. I, who had hitherto prided myself on self-restraint, gave way at last. I gave up the fruitless struggle, and let my spirit dwell with you. But the dream was transient. By chance I met a friend of yours. He knew the particulars of your youthful marriage, and the perfect happiness and devotion which existed between your husband and yourself. I knew it also, but I had tried to forget it. Alas ! it was a rough awakening, as I listened to the relation upon which he delighted to descant.

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Again I prayed for release from the captivity in which I gloried, while I strove to cast aside the chains which bound me to my heaven. I had not until now dwelt upon your happiness. My mind had run riot in the thought of all the bliss with which I could surround you.

“ But as he, this friend of your husband, continued speaking, my blindness fled. Your cup of joy was full, too full, for any drop from me to find a place. It was my flagon alone that was empty. Beggared, bankrupt, and fool that I was, to dream that I could enrich one, whose life’s coffers were filled to overflowing with priceless, peerless treasures. Ruined, too, utterly ruined in happiness, I knew myself to be, as he garbled on of your beauty, girlish innocence, and goodness. But I was still a man, I argued, and would yet be free. Had *you* been unhappy I would have turned dolt, idiot, anything to serve you. I married—nay, do not interrupt me—I pass over that.

My wife had loved before, or I might have hesitated. Her early love had been given to Stanley Wyldish.

"Ah! Mrs. Vivien, I see that your interest is awakened at last, your 'greatest friend' has, doubtless, told you of this before. Do you doubt my statements so fearlessly now?

"Shortly after my marriage, I came with my wife to England, and we visited you. The name of Wyldish fell often from the lips both of yourself and your husband. I had always hated the man. The first time your sweet face met my gaze, you turned it from me to smile upon him. I avoided him, and I went but seldom to Greyford Hall. For what reason you can now conjecture.

"Then came news which paralyzed me with grief for you. The sun had gone down suddenly. Your cup of felicity was emptied now. God knows how I suffered, and the manifold causes which I had for suffering.

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Only one hope remained, the old one, the present one, to serve you. But it was denied me.

“Stanley Wyldish met me at every turn.

“He was depended upon, and trusted in for everything. There was no place again for me. I thought that I was glad that you had so wise and firm a friend upon whom to lean in your bereavement. But it was only at the first that I imagined this.

“When the freshness of the stunning shock was over, my hatred of him increased, and it grew side by side with my renewed love for you. I determined to watch him, and, pardon me, Mrs. Vivien, I determined to watch you also. I said pardon, but I should rather have said pity me, because in watching you, I committed the maddest suicide. To watch you, was only to love you more deeply and wildly, as I watched.”

Violet essayed to speak, but he prevented her by continuing quickly :

“With my hatred for Wyldish grew a

suspicion that he was unworthy to approach her whom I thus loved; and ere long this suspicion became a certainty. Still I held on my way, looking for the time when the troubled one should turn to me.

“Once it seemed to have come, as I transported her carefully from her own home to mine. He was aloof, amusing himself amid a throng of idlers, of whom Miss Dallingcourt was the centre.

“Then came the prospect of another grief for you, and my heart, with its great love, almost sank within me.

“You carried your little one home, and I fought a weary battle with myself, when you were gone; winning sometimes, but losing oftener. Then came the sad intelligence that our worst fears had been verified. You were more entirely alone than before. I entered your walls, but only as one amongst numerous other sympathizing

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friends. Not such was Stanley Wyldish. I made no mistake this time. I knew there was no gladness in my heart, because you had him to lean upon. Then followed an hour of hideous horror, in which I was told that he loved you with the love which men are supposed to have for those whom they seek to wed. I might have guessed that it would be so, but I did not. His devotion to Miss Dallingcourt had cheated me into security. But from that time my adopted course was to search out the truth of the reports which were abroad about him, and thus to serve my love of long, long years."

Violet steadied herself against her cushions, and confronting him, again strove to check the words which he was uttering. But her effort was in vain. He pursued his subject, resolutely, speaking earnestly and quietly.

"I know all that you would say to me," he continued, "but I cannot pause, until I

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have denounced Stanley Wyldish, to be a ruined gamester and a dishonourable man, and I am prepared to prove him to be so to his face. One thing only could add to my indignant contempt and hatred of him, and that would be the knowledge that he has presumed to offer you the love which, in honour, belongs to Miss Dallingcourt. He will be here soon. Do not, I entreat, see him, but leave this house with me, and I will guard you, both from his untruth and the presumption of his presence. Come with me, Mrs. Vivien," he said, and before she could be aware of his intention, he had flung his powerful arm around her waist, as if he were about to bear her away.

She disengaged herself instantaneously, and passed swiftly to the other end of the room. Then, as if ashamed of her flight, she returned, and stood with proud calmness before him, as she said in a firm voice,

"I am defenceless, Major Harcourt, and you

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have insulted me. I am powerless, because, with one dire stroke, you have destroyed my confidence in yourself: you have shaken my happy trust in the friendship of your wife, and you have slandered my best friend. The love you have mentioned, you dared not to have breathed, had not my husband's place upon earth been vacant. You have made me feel for the first time in all my wretchedness as if God were far from me; you have forgotten Him," she continued sadly, "or you would not have said all this to me."

She stood a few paces from him, and her womanly indignation had sent a flush across her cheek and brow, while Lionel Harcourt was growing whiter every instant with suppressed emotion.

"You are perfectly right," he returned, "I have forgotten every consideration but you. I would that thus it might ever remain, and that, lingering always by your side, I might

lose myself, and all else, in a bliss too rapturous for description. Grant me some reward, Mrs. Vivien, for the long devotion of my love?"

" You and yours have not only been kind to me, but have also nursed me in my sickness, and sheltered me in my sorrow, or I would not deign to answer you," she returned scornfully. " Do you know," she proceeded with thrilling earnestness, " what you are saying to me? Oh, Major Harcourt, why have you done this? I was at peace before you came to me, and now your contemptible sophistry has made me wretched. I will listen to no more of it," she added, turning suddenly from him.

Lionel Harcourt started as he divined that her intention was to leave him, and he followed her a few steps across the apartment as if to detain her. But this was impossible. His quick sense of hearing detected a footstep in the hall. The door of the room

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in which they stood was opened almost simultaneously with his movement, and seizing the opportunity Violet fled from him.

## CHAPTER IX.

"A moment's thinking is an hour in words."

LIONEL HARCOURT was *hors de combat*. His servant, by whose opportune appearance Violet had been enabled to make her escape, announced the arrival of a visitor.

Mentally consigning both servant and friend to perdition, he ordered that the latter should be shown into another room. His machinations had been foiled, and that which he imagined would have sent Violet fluttering with indignation against others, and drawn her closer to himself, had erected an impassable barrier between them.

He recognized this instantaneously, as she

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swiftly glided from him. Her words of faith, so directly antagonistic to those of slander which he had repeated to her, rang in his ears. Her shrinking with horror at his touch haunted him.

Through the sincerity and single-mindedness of his wife, Lionel Harcourt, by degrees, had gathered the information of which he had just made use.

Prejudice and selfishness had combined to magnify to him the flaws in the conduct of Stanley Wyldish: but, his love for Violet was the quickening power which wrought the whole into the strategy which was now so signally overthrown.

At all hazards he felt it was imperative that he should see Violet before proceeding to his visitor. Their interview had ended so abruptly, that it had left no oasis in the desert of his despair, from which he might hope to quench its fever. Taking pencil and paper in his hand, he scrawled a few hasty

words, entreating Violet to return if only for a few moments. But he had scarcely finished writing, before he felt embarrassed as to the policy of risking the return of the note unopened.

He had not much time for deliberation, and his position as master of the house, surrounded by his own servants, rendered caution in his movements most essential. After a brief space of consideration, therefore, the despatch was destroyed, and he decided upon the propriety of guarding against any action which might entail domestic suspicion. Accordingly he proceeded to his guest with outward composure.

The romance of life, although at one time it quickens the pulsation of our heart, and at another well-nigh stays its beating, does not change the every-day incidents around us.

Thus Lionel Harcourt, having only a few minutes before broken through every restraint, in a desperate attempt to engulf him-

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self more thoroughly in the cataract of his unlawful desires, and in doing so to clasp another in his sinking embrace, now found himself compelled to submit to conventionality, while emotion was shaking every fibre of his soul.

His jovial, mirth-loving, easy-going friend must be entertained, and he could propound no medium to himself by which Violet might be approached. Moreover, after a short conversation, he was forced to proceed with his visitor to a public meeting, the engagement for which he had completely forgotten, and where no excuse for his absence would be accepted. But it was beyond his power of endurance to remain there for any length of time.

Pleading a violent headache and sudden indisposition, he left in order that he might return home, and at any rate learn something of Violet before his wife could do so, or Stanley Wyldish arrive. His return accom-

plished, he fervently trusted that some opportunity would arise, which should afford him an opportunity for unfurling a flag of truce, by which to gain a hearing from Violet.

The rain had discontinued, but everything conspired to thwart his design of progressing homeward. He had scarcely gained the open air when he was overtaken by his colonel, who was intent on showing him a horse of which he had just completed the purchase.

The stables were close at hand, therefore the inspection was inevitable. It was lengthy in proportion to the gratification of the purchaser, as such inspections usually are. In this instance, it appeared to Lionel Harcourt to be interminable.

At last he escaped ; but only to be overtaken by some ladies, who detained him with long messages to "Dear Mrs. Harcourt, and would he ask her to let them know how they were to keep the fish alive in their aquariums,

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and why their sea anemones hardly ever opened?" They were moreover very profuse in their petitions to him, not to forget what they had said, "because it really was dreadful to see the poor little fish die, and so stupid of the anemones never to come out."

Lionel Harcourt, having promised to prove the most faithful and trustworthy of message-bearers, had already doffed his hat in the hope of release, when he was detained by the piteous ejaculation :

" Oh ! Major Harcourt, do please help us —our dog has run away, while we have been talking. We would not lose the dear little fellow, or have him hurt for all the world ; and he is sure to be stolen, or to fight a big dog if he meets one."

Lionel Harcourt glared around impatiently for the missing quadruped. There was no alternative, however, but to accompany the distressed ladies up one turning, and down

the next, until at length the lost pet was found, contentedly gnawing a discarded bone which had been thrown from a butcher's shop. Notwithstanding the alarm of the fair owners, his appearance was infinitely more suggestive of running away from, rather than of provoking, an attack. Under cover of the joy which was experienced at the sight of the lost treasure, and amid a volley of smiles, bows, and thanks, Lionel Harcourt took his leave, and was once more under weigh, striving to reach his house.

But it was too late. As he neared home his wife's carriage appeared rapidly approaching. Therefore it was impossible that he could arrive before her.

The meeting, together with the newly-acquired steed, the thirst for the knowledge of successful piscatorial treatment, and the lost cur, were anathematized freely, as he abruptly turned on his heel and chose any

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direction rather than that which he had been so anxiously pursuing.

He crossed the road, and exchanged his course for a circuitous route leading from the town, with very indistinct notions floating through his mind, either of way of road, or of path of conduct.

## CHAPTER X.

“And learns her gone, and far from home.”

MRS. HARCOURT stepped lightly from her carriage upon reaching home, and, softly humming one of her favourite airs, hastened to seek Violet. She was surprised to find the apartment unoccupied in which she had left her.

Little dreaming of the die which had been cast within those four walls since she quitted them, she glanced complacently around, and, having drawn off her gloves, proceeded to search for her husband.

She was enjoying the cheerful satisfaction attendant upon the completion of a desired

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plan in which self forms no part, and companionship, therefore, would have been more agreeable to her than solitude.

She was disappointed in finding that Lionel Harcourt was not in the house, and perhaps still more so to learn from her maid that Violet had retired to her own room, and, from the stillness which reigned within, the shrewd abigail argued that Mrs. Vivien was resting.

Unlike her husband, Margaret Harcourt was rejoicing sincerely at the coming of Stanley Wyldish. Different views may be taken of the same landscape, and different opinions may be formed upon what appears to be the simplest question. But nothing could be more strongly diversified, both in its future and in its present results, than the effect of the same intelligence upon the minds of Margaret and Lionel Harcourt respecting Stanley Wyldish.

The stories of scandal which encrusted his

fame, did not deter Margaret Harcourt from patiently removing their disfigurements. Unconscious that the heart of her husband was not with her in her work, she revealed both her labour and its results to him, and thus supplied him with the material which he so desired to obtain. The vivid colouring of malice met with no generous shading at his hand, and his heart was closely barred against the justice, with which his wife strove to restore the fair character which had been daubed by defamation and exaggerated report.

Stanley Wyldish had met the proffered friendship of Mrs. Harcourt with frank and hearty gratitude.

Mutual anxiety for Violet had speedily thrown off all restraint, and the result of renewed intercourse had been such as to convince Margaret Harcourt that she ran no risk of endangering the peace of mind of Violet, by bringing to pass the approaching

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interview. It was with unmitigated pleasure, therefore, that she received the announcement of his arrival, which told her that his expected appearance had passed into a reality.

Thus far, indeed, all had gone smoothly. Neither adverse fate had stopped his leave nor reckless engine-driver delayed his train.

She greeted him warmly, and after a slight apology for the absence of Major Harcourt, explained to him that Violet was resting, or would doubtless have appeared to welcome him immediately.

It would have been difficult, just then, to have estimated the degree of impatience with which they each awaited her appearance. At length Mrs. Harcourt could restrain herself no longer.

"If you will excuse me one moment," she remarked with a bright smile, "I will go and tell Mrs. Vivien that you have arrived. The orders are very rigid that she should

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never be disturbed when resting, therefore it may be possible that she does not know you are here."

Stanley Wyldish, being thus left alone, fondly dreamed that he waited on the threshold of an hour which would seal his doom, and on the brink of a test, which he prayed would give him pardon and love.

The moments passed unheeded at first, so rife were his meditations with delight at the prospect of once more beholding Violet. But, suddenly, busy fancy snapped her thread, and stayed the weaving of her bright imaginations within him.

The delay of the return of Mrs. Harcourt, and of the non-appearance of Violet, disquieted him. He listened anxiously, but the movements in a strange house did not enlighten him.

Doors were opened and shut again rapidly, while footsteps overhead and around seemed to be hurrying to and fro. He could not tell,

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however, that such sounds were not customary in the household.

By-and-by, to his unspeakable relief, a servant brought word to him that Mrs. Harcourt was detained for a short time, and therefore she begged that he would excuse her absence.

With this meagre comfort wherewith to solace himself, another weary space of time had to be endured.

All at once, something, which he could never explain, reminded him of his appalling arrival at Greyford Hall, when he found that death had preceded him and had claimed little May for its own.

Never before that grievous time, and never since then until now, had that creeping chill of agonized dread entombed his fearlessness, and so quickened his pulse.

In the one instance it was vague and unaccountable. No experience of precedent occasioned it.

But now it was as if the ghost of that horror pointed with warning finger to the memory of Violet and her child, as they lay stretched out together, in that awful stillness.

He pressed his hands tightly over his eyes, as if attempting to shut out from his mind the remembrance of the picture. As he did so, a yet more fearful thought arose. All the histories, which he had ever heard, of sudden emotion having proved fatal to those weakened by illness occurred to him, and presented the horrible suggestion that thus it might be with Violet. He wiped the dew of horror from his forehead as he conceived the idea that, perchance, while he had been forced to remain in durance there, she might be already dead.

The wildest fear and the wildest love alternately distracted him, beating down his courage with such resistless force, that not even the blanched face of Margaret Harcourt,

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as she now stood before him, added to his alarm.

"I have bad news," she said, resting her hand upon his arm, and speaking in a low voice, while her lip quivered and the tears glistened in her eyes. "Mrs. Vivien is not in her room; she and Bon-bon are both gone, and none can tell me whither."

"Thank God!" burst from the lips of Stanley Wyldish, greatly to the amazement of his companion.

"Thank God," he repeated again. "Then you have not come to tell me she is dead."

"Dead!" echoed Margaret Harcourt, with a shudder. "What made you dream of anything so horrible! It is quite distressing enough not to know why she has disappeared, or where she is gone."

Stanley Wyldish staggered as if smitten by a sudden illness, and with a groan, replied in a voice of unutterable sadness—

"She has gone from *me*. She knew that I was coming, and she has gone rather than see *me*, and my punishment is greater than I can bear. How long is it since she left?"

"I believe it to be about three hours," was the answer.

"And Harcourt—where is he?" inquired Stanley Wyldish, with increasing emotion.

"My husband," answered Mrs. Harcourt, soothingly; "I have sent for him. He may, perhaps, be able to enlighten us, although I hear he left the house with a friend, and that Mrs. Vivien was seen entering her room a short time previously. I cannot think that we need distress ourselves. Surely she will return before long. There is nothing missing from her room. Do not think she has gone to avoid you, Captain Wyldish. I am sure it is not so."

Her tears fell fast as she tried to comfort his keener distress. She knew it was a bitter

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trial for him to be thus launched, as it were, from the land of promise into the gulf of woe.

At length the messenger returned without any intelligence of Lionel Harcourt.

This fact considerably increased the difficulties and agitation of his wife, while a fierce suspicion swept through the brain of Stanley Wyldish.

It came to him unbidden, and he held it in check; but he felt that he could not hold the scales of justice with an equal poise. His feelings were too deeply lacerated. Goaded almost into frenzy by disappointment and alarm, he assisted in the search for a possible letter from Violet, or some other clue to her mysterious disappearance. The heart-sickening fruitless quest was almost ended, when Mrs. Harcourt discovered that, in addition to Bon-bon, a travelling-bag belonging to Violet was also missing. The railway

station was within half a mile distance of the house, and this discovery was no sooner made, than he rushed thither.

Making his inquiries, with as much indifference as his grief would permit him to assume, he ascertained that a lady, attired in deep mourning, had travelled by the afternoon train to London, and, moreover, that a little dog accompanied her, which savagely represented being put into the dog-box. The descriptions were not very lucid ; while one porter affirmed that the lady was very dark and stout, another stated that she was thin and had with her a gray-haired gentleman.

Drowning men, however, clutch at straws, and the mourning dress seemed to Stanley Wyldish, in his desperation, to indicate that it was she.

He returned to share his scanty gleanings with Mrs. Harcourt, in the hope that she

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might have something more to add to his store.

But it was all a blank. There were no tidings either of Violet or of Lionel Harcourt. The hour of dinner, at which he was an expected guest, had passed, and yet his host had failed to appear.

If this unusual absence created more than wonderment in the mind of Margaret Harcourt, she did not suffer it to appear. She was much calmer than Stanley Wyldish, and her dignified presence of mind, not only preserved decorum in her establishment, but also quieted the curiosity of the domestics.

Her reward came shortly. The eagerness of Stanley Wyldish to be up and doing was perfectly irrepressible, and he had scarcely related to her the result of his inquiries before he started to prosecute his researches in another direction, and also to endeavour to meet with Lionel Harcourt.

While she was waiting patiently both for his return and also for that of her husband, the latter stood before her, and, with an unruffled bearing, smilingly apologized for his delayed appearance.

## CHAPTER XI.

“And wintry winds that pipe so loud.”

EXPERIENCE has proved that a heavy rain is one of the most efficacious dispersers of a disorderly mob of audacious ruffians. Perhaps after a somewhat similar fashion, the damp and cold of this November evening, upon which Lionel Harcourt had plodded down muddy lanes and across wet fields, had their effect in quelling some of the desperation which was raging in his heart. Bodily discomfort will not be ignored for long.

After a rapid walk of some miles, he awoke to the consciousness that he was in wet clothes, on an unknown road, with the

wintry wind driving the rain across his face.

He pushed on for a short distance, and then stopped, as he found himself on a desolate bleak common. In the darkness, he had more than once brushed against a stunted bush, and stumbled over a tuft of long dead grass. A solitary tree reared up its trunk a few yards from where he stood. It looked black even in the surrounding gloom, and the moan of the wind, as it rattled in its leafless branches, sent a shiver through his frame.

To remain in his present position was a simple impossibility. He looked around, therefore, for a light, which, glimmering from the window of some cottage, might enable him to ask directions of its inmates by which to recover his road.

He had by no means decided, as he did so, that he would return to his home. His perplexity as to the manner in which Violet

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would act rendered this step a matter of indecision to him. But as his thoughts had been hovering continually around the possible events which might be stirring within the interior of his house, so now he determined to retrace his steps, and to reconnoitre their symptoms from the exterior.

To be forewarned is to be forearmed. As he adopted the maxim of this prudential adage, he fervently hoped that, under cover of the darkness, and in the region of his domicile, some happy chance might enlighten his ignorance and direct his tactics.

Having arrived at this conclusion, he hailed with joy a faint twinkle of light, and immediately turned his steps thitherward. The information which he then obtained enabled him once more to reach the high road.

He lost no time in progressing hastily homewards, but he slackened his speed when within a short distance of the neighbourhood

in which he resided, to one more in accordance with his usually deliberate movements.

He had almost reached the fence which surrounded the grounds attached to his house, when he was accosted by a man whom he did not at first recognize as a help employed about his stables.

“Beg your pardon, sir, but I hopes the lady is all safe?”

Shrewdness whispered to Lionel Harcourt that his wished-for opportunity had arrived.

“All right, I hope, my man,” he replied, promptly.

His answer was given on the spur of the moment, as the occasion demanded, but hours of deliberation could not have framed one to serve his purpose better.

“Thank you, sir,” was the rejoinder. “I shouldn’t ha’ made bold to ax’, only every one in the place is very anxious about Mrs. Vivien, seeing as she took nothing away with her, but her dog. I know’d that, as she went

afore Mrs. Harcourt drove home, it were all right, sir, and that you were aware on it. Good-night, sir, and thank ye kindly."

The man saluted his master respectfully, and then passed on.

"Good God!" ejaculated Lionel Harcourt, "what have I driven her to do?"

A few scalding tears oozed from his eyes, as he thought of her flight, and feared for her safety.

But anon, above the raging of the pitiless elements around him, and above the conflict of remorse and passion within him, soared the welcome fact that Violet had gone before his wife returned, and therefore without seeing Stanley Wyldish.

It was the solitary point upon which his scheme had worked favourably. He drew a long breath, which sounded akin to a sigh of relief.

Buoyed up by the instinct of self-preservation, he saw that his procrastinated return

would aggravate suspicion, if any had been formed, of the real motives for the flight of Violet.

Accordingly, he directed his steps swiftly to the entrance of his house, and, by the aid of his latch-key, entered unperceived. After which he quickly gathered full particulars of the event from an officious underling. Thus fortified, he presented himself before his wife, with whom he had been holding deep counsel when Stanley Wyldish appeared.

He had smoothed away all outward traces of storms within and storms without, and was listening to her apparently with extreme solicitude.

He advanced towards Stanley Wyldish, who drew himself to his full height as he haughtily received his proffered welcome. At the sight of Lionel Harcourt, his whole being seemed fired with new life. He had entered the room pale and haggard, with his large erect frame bowed, as if the weight of

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years had been suddenly laid upon it. But as the sound of the politely-measured sentence fell upon his ear, and the calm, sinister face of the speaker met his eye, a duskier hue burned upon his bronzed complexion, as his old jealousy sent a thrill of excitement through him.

But Lionel Harcourt preserved a composed and steady front. Innocence will often blush when guilt remains undisturbed, while desperation and despair will create an outward stoicism of which the guiltless affect no semblance.

The most immediate dread, under which Lionel Harcourt was labouring, was that of being closely questioned by Stanley Wyldish. He, therefore, took up his position under the shelter and defence which was cast over him by the presence of his wife. It was a crafty manœuvre, but it did not escape the vigilant observation of his adversary.

The true and beautiful Margaret Har-

court, as she moved her tearful eyes from the one to the other of those before her, could little fathom the invulnerable protection which she was affording to her husband.

A few plans were hastily discussed by the trio, and then Stanley Wyldish communicated his intention of hastening to London. The lady of whom he had heard at the station might, he still thought, prove to be Violet, and he further hoped that the dog, which travelled with her, might excite attention at the London terminus, and thus assist his investigations.

The mystery with which the whole affair was enshrouded maddened him.

It had been a day of downfall to many a hope which to waking eyes had seemed sure of being fulfilled. And the pall of night had settled gloomily over all. It was as a pall of funereal mournfulness to Stanley Wyldish, and as one which concealed increasing apprehension to Lionel Harcourt.

It hid Violet from them both, and although

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each longed to lift the heavy covering and to find himself face to face with her, yet each quailed before the dread of what might then be revealed.

Would the cold winding-sheet of disdain be wrapped around her sweet figure, repelling for ever the devotion which awaited her?

Would her fair countenance, with a fixed rigidity, mock the wild appeals of the destroyer of her peace and trust?

Some such thoughts as these dwelt separately in the minds of Stanley Wyldish and Lionel Harcourt.

Meanwhile, discussion of means for the recovery or for the knowledge of the safety of the fugitive, were continued between them.

The missing travelling-bag, however, was destined to afford a tangible clue whereby to act.

A maid, who had that day been dismissed by Mrs. Harcourt, brought the intelligence

that she had carried the bag, and walked with Mrs. Vivien to the station.

The girl's statement was very simple. She had wished her fellow-servants farewell, and was proceeding down a garden-path, which was used by Lionel Harcourt as a short cut through a shrubbery to the town, when she met Mrs. Vivien, who asked her to accompany her. She did so, proceeding afterwards to see some friends. Returning to the lodgings which she had engaged from the wife of the man who had accosted Lionel Harcourt, she had heard of the disappearance of Mrs. Vivien, and had accordingly hastened to impart her information.

It was of infinite importance to Stanley Wyldish. With all his desire to proceed to London, a lingering suspicion had still made him wish to keep Lionel Harcourt in sight, but this information dispelled it.

Violet was evidently far away.

Nothing, therefore, could be gained by re-

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maining where he was. In the event of the morning's post bringing them no tidings, the Harcourts would also repair to London on the morrow.

Having arrived at the end of his journey, Stanley Wyldish proceeded with his inquiries, but without result.

He therefore drove to his rooms in — Street, and after some delay aroused the inmates of the house and gained admittance. Too greatly harassed for sleep, he flung himself upon a couch in his sitting-room, and passed, as best he could, the remainder of that dreary night.

The embers of the fire of his jealousy of Lionel Harcourt, which had been deadened by the sorrow which had arisen to Violet, and by his own confession of love to her, blazed anew. As they re-kindled, his ungovernable wrath formed some reprieve to him from the suffering which he was enduring.



The stroke which she had inflicted that day, he deemed was intended by her to be significantly understood as annihilation to his hopes. Moreover, he remembered with a pang that he had no right to presume upon her privacy, if she were resolved to maintain it.

But, however this might be, or however crushed and spurned his love should be, he determined that he would allow neither the sole of his foot to rest, nor his weary eyelids to close in slumber, until he was satisfied that she, whom it had been his privilege to watch over, was securely protected.

Filled with this resolve, he started with early morning in the hope of finding that Lord Marchmont was in town.

Here, again, however, he was destined to meet with disappointment. Lord Marchmont was not expected for a couple of days.

He next explored the various hotels and places at which he knew that Violet and

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her husband had been accustomed to stay. Then he remembered the name of her milliner, and dauntlessly presented himself in the temple of fashion with the off-hand, easy inquiry,

“ Has Mrs. Vivien been here yet to-day ?”

This was answered glibly with,

“ No, sir ! Mrs. Vivien has not been for some months. All orders are sent to us by post.”

It was enough.

He next hazarded visits to several who were mutual acquaintances of his own and of Violet. But there was failure for him everywhere. It was in vain that he expended his adroitness in ascertaining whether they had recently seen or heard of her. They had nothing to reveal. They “had not seen pretty Mrs. Vivien for ages. Was it true that she was going to be married again, or was she really in a decline, and dying ?”

He was in no state of mind to be thus interrogated. The subject, therefore, which had cost him some pains to introduce, was dismissed abruptly, and his visit terminated as speedily as possible.

Amid these fluctuating hopes, he returned perpetually to the club for the telegram which Mrs. Harcourt had promised to send. It did not arrive until long after the time he expected that it would, and, like everything else, afforded him no comfort. It ran thus :

“ No letter this morning. Major Harcourt detained here to-day. Hopes to see you at the Langham at four to-morrow. Please telegraph if there is any news. None here.”

## CHAPTER XII.

"Nothing useless is, or low."

"SHE's come, Jack, she's come, the mistress, and she's 'ere, Jack, sure as you're alive ; she is, indeed!" exclaimed Susan Carrington breathlessly to her husband.

"What's the old gal a talkin' 'bout now, I wonder?" he answered, taking off his cap, and looking good humouredly at his wife.

Judging from his outward man, circumstances had improved for Jack Carrington, since we saw him last.

Through the instrumentality of Lord Marchmont, he had been removed from the labour of his agricultural life, to the somewhat more

lucrative employment of porter at the Great Northern Terminus.

Consequently, he and Susan had exchanged their pretty cottage where the honeysuckle around the porch had "wov'n its wavy bowers," for a house near to his occupation. It was situated in rather a dull-looking street, and, like the other houses which surrounded it, told its story plainly to the passing observer, that the occupants had retrograded from the superior quality of the first inhabitants. But the significant notices of "Lodgings to Let," which were fastened on doors, affixed to area railings, or pendent from windows, suggested that at any rate the present tenants were zealously endeavouring to make up for this defalcation by an increase of quantity.

Susan was not behind her neighbours in this ambition. Her tenement boasted of a drawing-room, which, with one or two bedrooms, she let furnished, converting as she

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did so, many a lodger from the hardness of their hearts, and implanting in them more confiding notions of the honesty and cleanliness of lodging-house keepers.

The notice that her drawing-room was now to be let, hung conspicuously upon the iron gate which opened upon a flight of stone steps leading to the underground part of the house, in a front room of which Susan had met her husband upon his return from the station with the exclamation which was puzzling him.

“ What are you a talkin’ of ? ” he repeated. “ Why, this is London. How can the lady be here ? ”

“ She ’ave come, though, I tell you, Jack, she ’ave. She drove up in a cab, and, oh, dear ! oh, dear ! what we is to do for her to eat her wictuals on, I can’t no ways tell. She’s come, I tell yer again, Jack, though you looks as though you didn’t believe me, but she’s in this werry ’ouse, as sure as you’re a live man,

Jack. She's took our drorin'-room floor as we 'ad to let, though I ain't had no time to take the ticket down. Lor's, 'tain't no drorin'-room floor to her, but for all that she's a sittin' there, looking for all the world like a princess, only princesses, leastways them I sees presentations on in the shop windys, 'as rosy cheeks, and she 'ave pale ones, poor dear. Yes, Jack, she's up there, sure enough, and all she says to me is, 'Don't let nobody come to me, Susan. I wish to bide a bit with you. Take care on me please, Susan.' An' care I will take on her, too, Jack, and if some 'un wants to come to her as how she don't want 'em to, they'll just 'ave to walk over my dead body first, that's all. I should think I should take care on her, poor dear, lost her bonny little 'un, and everything else belonging to her as she 'as, an' all misfortin' like, and no sort o' fault o' hers. I wishes I were made o' gold, I'd cut a piece off myself for her, that I would."

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"Why, you've bin an' lost your 'ead, old gal, since I left yer this morning. Does you really mean now to tell a chap that the lady, she 'as belongs to the Hall, is above stairs?"

(There was but one Lady and one Hall to Jack and Susan Carrington.)

"Yes, Jack, I does," Susan answered, decidedly, "indeed I does. I were a dustin'. Such a damp evening, I thought, and getting late, people won't be a looking about 'em for our drorin'-room floor, so I were a giving it a regular dust, and a feeling proud on it, you know, Jack, and thinking as who'd have thought that you and me would ever 'ave 'ad a chimley glass and such lovely chairs, and all of a sudden something stopped afore the door, an' she had drove up in a cab, so down I goes as fast as my legs would carry me, and all she says to me when I gets down the steps to her, were, 'Can I bide with you, Susan, for a bit, and don't let nobody cum to

me?' So I curtsys an' I says, 'Yes, if you please ma'am,' and then she guv me her purse, and I pays the cabby, and she's bin a sobbin' up there ever since, and I'm in sich a prespiration with it all, Jack, I doesn't know what never to do with myself."

"Don't, missus! don't you take on like that," said Jack. "If she be come, why, she be come, an' we'll take care on her an' do the best as we can for her, an' we can't do no more. She be in trouble o' some sort afresh, I'm afeard, and if she be, she's cum to the right shop, old gal, if she's cum to you for comfort."

Susan waxed a little calmer under the soothing influence of her husband's speech.

"She won't 'ave no dinner, Jack," she resumed, fanning herself with her pocket-handkerchief, and re-settling her apron, which, in the general excitement of its wearer, had become twisted almost out of sight at the back of her, "only tea. Lucky as we've got your grand-

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mother's old company teapot, and this 'ere best tea-tray," she went on more cheerfully, and dusting as she spoke a huge china teapot, with half-a-dozen rivets in it, and a piece chipped off the end of the spout, which interfered considerably with its contents being comfortably poured from it.

In addition to which difficulty, the lid being a trifle too small, had a trick of either falling off with a splash into the cups, or else of trying to dive amid the tea leaves, by slipping sideways into the boiling water.

"Lucky I've got a 'ansome teapot," Susan reiterated.

With which self-congratulatory speech, she surveyed it complacently, as she walked a few paces from where she had placed it upon the "best tray." Such a tray! So unmistakably tin, and adorned with representations of poppies—the wildest of wild poppies that ever grew among wild oats. It was soon,

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however, with the cracked heirloom, being carried to its destination.

Susan had spoken truly to her husband. Violet, much tried and spirit-tossed, feeble in body from her unwonted exertion, and feeble in heart from her conflict with one who deemed that he loved her well, was the unexpected occupant of the "drorin'-room" belonging to Jack and Susan Carrington.

As the latter entered to remove the remnants of the slight repast, Violet was trying to rest herself upon a leather chair, whose hard uncomfortable stuffing and upright back had made her slender neck ache painfully, as she leaned her beating temples, first on one side, and then on the other.

"If my room is ready for me, Susan, I will ask you to be good enough to assist me to undress," she said wearily.

"Yes, ma'am, if you please, ma'am," answered Susan, curtseying nervously, and

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without having the smallest notion of what she was expected to do.

"Then, I will go to bed, and I should like my bath quite warm, if you please."

"Yes, ma'am, if you please, ma'am," again answered Susan, and, with another nervous curtsey, she continued, "Only there's never a bath in the 'ouse, if you please, ma'am, but the children's tub, as they uses o' Saturdays, if you please, ma'am."

"How stupid of me!" cried Violet quickly. "I had forgotten. Never mind, Susan, I do not wish for one. Let me have my candles. I am quite safe here with you, am I not? You will not tell any one," she added, "that I am here, or allow any one to come to me?"

"Not a soul shall ever come a-nigh you, ma'am, if you please, ma'am, as you doesn't want 'em to, and not a soul, if you please, ma'am, shall ever know as how you are here, ma'am, as you doesn't want 'em to. Sleep

easy, if you please, ma'am, and try to think of nothink. Jack and me will sit up all night, if you please, ma'am."

"Oh, no, Susan ! thank you. There is no need for that, therefore you must not think of it. But take me to bed now," she sobbed gently, as a child, tired with some unusual fatigue or excitement, might petition its nurse.

During the conversation, Susan had, more than once, rubbed the back of her hand, shyly, across her eyes, to stay her tears from falling, but before Violet had concluded, they were dropping fast. She had forgotten her trepidation, as she looked upon Violet's wistful, wobegone face, which she turned towards her as she begged for care and rest.

## CHAPTER XIII.

“But now the living cause my pain.”

THE six “little ‘uns,” of whom Jack Carrington was so proud, must have thought that London had become suddenly converted into treacle and sweets, so lavishly did their mother promise to bestow them upon all, who noiselessly submitted to the process of washing and dressing on the morrow.

Unfortunately the delight of the anticipated feast so intoxicated the youngsters with imaginary pleasure, and their spirits rose so high, that the design of the bribe was in danger of becoming frustrated. Jack, also,

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whose step was heavy, and whose movements were ponderous, received almost as many injunctions.

But he was second only to Susan, in the warmth of his loyalty to Violet, and therefore accepted his instructions cheerfully. He crept stealthily down the stairs, with his boots in hand, instead of on his feet, and breakfasting as quickly as possible stepped softly from his threshold as he sallied forth to his early labours. But the kindly precautions were unnecessary.

Violet awoke with that start which the sense of misery occasions, before recollection clearly defines it. She looked around the small, and to her strangely-appointed, room. It was not yet daybreak, and therefore the apartment was only rendered visible by the shaded light which had been burning throughout the night. It was with difficulty that she realized her position, but before long she understood but too plainly

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the dull heavy throb of pain with which her sleep had departed.

One by one the incidents of the previous day returned to her. She shivered with renewed anguish at the remembrance of the treachery which had driven her from the home of Lionel Harcourt. Hitherto every circumstance of her life had combined to make her trustful: none had deceived her. God had taken her dearest ones away, but they had never failed her. They had gone from her to Him, leaving her the memory of their truth and love. Others were away upon earth, but they also had gone with untarnished affection, and the thought of them was peace to her.

She was bending now before the blast, which had wrought such cruel chaos in the faith of her confiding nature. The transparent and smooth waters of sincerity, on which Violet had heretofore happily moved, and which had afforded to her so many happy

memories of those on whom she had leant so trustingly, had become ruffled, and she shrank from the changed reflection which they presented to her now. It was an experience which all, who pass beyond the morning hours of life, are doomed to gain.

In this way Lionel Harcourt had wrought a deed of woe, which no subsequent penitence could efface !

Before Violet entered the room, which for the present formed drawing-room, boudoir, and dining-room to her, Susan had been invaded by sundry visits from inquisitive neighbours. All were anxious to know something of the young lady, whom they had seen drive up in a cab the day before. But Susan was invincible.

- “Yes,” she answered to their inquiries, “a young lady ‘ad arrived. No denyin’ of that, and she ‘ad took the drorin’-room floor as she ‘ad to let—no denyin’ o’ that neither.

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There was nothin' more to tell, and what more could they want to hask. There was nothin' noways remarkable about it, except that it were lucky for her to 'ave let her lodgin's, and she 'oped as how that they would do the same."

"But," her friends responded, "surely you might say whether the lady is married or single. She looked very young-like to be going about, and nobody with her. Where did she come from? and how did you know that she was respectable? Why you may never see the colour of her money."

If Susan had discovered a nugget of gold, or a Koh-i-noor in the small oblong yard at the back of her house, which formed a sort of coop in which her children played, she could not have been more supremely indifferent to the latter remark, while to the former an ominous twitching at the corners of her mouth showed how hard a restraint she was exercising over her risibility as well as her volubility.

She chose, however, the better part of valour, and remained grave and silent, contenting herself with a grim smile of satisfaction as her questionists departed. When Jack returned to his dinner, she detailed their discomfiture to him with considerable elation, and assured him that "when their feet took them 'ome again, they carried no more hin-formation in their 'eads than if they'd never been."

The gossips were not satisfied, but there was nothing wherewith to feed their hunger. Curiosity lives long, however, upon a fictitious sustenance, and the sight of the sweet, pale face, which once or twice looked wonderingly from the window, was sufficient to support it. Beyond this momentary appearance of Violet, there was nothing to betoken that Susan, as she affirmed, had "let her drorin'-room floor."

But inside, matters were vastly different. Her honest-hearted excitement was increased

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rather than diminished, as she taxed her resources and ingenuity to the utmost, to supply what she considered to be, anything approaching suitable servance, for Violet.

The morning wore away. Now and then Violet was astonished by an uncouth member of society, who, with discordant voice, disturbed the quiet of the street, as he vended some cheap ware or article of food; or it might be, perhaps, by one more unruly than he, shouting, in half intoxication, snatches of popular songs. It was all very strange and incongruous to Violet, but the faithful, unexpressed sympathy of Susan reconciled her for the time, and inspired her with a sensation of safety.

When she fled from Lionel Harcourt, on the previous day, she rushed to her own chamber and flung herself upon her knees.

Her first idea had been to await explanation from Mrs. Harcourt, but, with his betrayal of others, Lionel Harcourt had planted a dread

secret of himself, which made Violet shrink from challenging her to account for her apparently mysterious conduct.

She wrung her hands in despair, as sentence after sentence recurred to her of the words which he had uttered. His bold denunciation of Stanley Wyldish; the history of Inah Dallingcourt; and the old affection, which he told, had existed between Mrs. Harcourt and Stanley Wyldish. All these flashed fiercely back upon her. Her faith tottered—her courage fell. She was seized with a sudden horror at remaining where she was. She felt as if treachery lurked in every corner, and poisoned the very air she breathed. It suffocated her with its dread teaching, until she resolved that, rather than meet either Mrs. Harcourt or Stanley Wyldish, she would flee far from the reach of either. The fear of again encountering Lionel Harcourt, and the short time which now remained before the arrival

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of Stanley Wyldish, stimulated her to a decision.

She seized her hat with trembling hand, and then, wrapping herself, hastily, in her furs, took Bon-bon in her arms. In breathless haste she was passing with him from her room, when the sound of voices in the hall below, made her recede swiftly.

She had no capacity for reflection in her emergency, but as she waited until all should grow quiet again, she mechanically thrust a few articles into her travelling-bag, and prepared to take it with her.

The desire of flight grew into a frenzy as she was thus delayed. The barbs, which Lionel Harcourt had hurled, smote her in quick succession, lacerating her gentle bosom, until her belief in those on whom she relied lay quivering and well-nigh expiring at her feet.

Again the sound of voices arrested her attention. Looking from her window, she

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perceived Lionel Harcourt and his friend leaving the precincts of the house. She bounded across the room with the strength which excitement lent to her, and in a few minutes she was walking, lightly and rapidly, to the railway station.

There was little time for more than procuring her ticket and arranging for the transit of Bon-bon, before the train came up. The necessary haste suited well her state of agitation. She had never before travelled alone, but she took her seat eagerly, without a thought of fear. But after the first few miles of rapid motion had somewhat calmed her, a cold sense of loneliness overpowered her. Never had she so yearned for the protection and love of her husband and child. She felt as if she were an outcast and an exile, adrift from every earthly tie, while over her soul a darkness settled, which had never as yet brooded there.

“Pray God have pity on me and guard

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me," she murmured to herself, as in the indistinct light, which had now overtaken her, she could distinguish that she was nearing London. When the first impulse of journeying thither presented itself to her, she had determined upon directing her course to the homely roof of Susan Carrington. She apprehended no difficulty, at the time, about reaching it.

The misery which drove her forth allowed her to see no obstacle in the way. But now, her isolated position, and the darkening atmosphere, frightened her.

"What shall I do if Susan has left her house?—and when I leave the train, how shall I reach it?" she asked herself.

At length she took courage to inquire her way of a kindly-looking fellow-traveller, who explained it carefully to her. Her sorrowful young face had not appealed in vain. At the conclusion of the journey a porter and conveyance were quickly found, and she was

soon safely on her route. Her first words upon reaching Susan, were, as we know, a petition for protection.

She was suffering now from the reaction, consequent upon the agitation of the preceding day. The flashes of indignation which had heightened her scorn, as she replied to Lionel Harcourt, no longer animated her. She was too tired to think and too wearied to act.

But the words which had brought her such dismay—the syllables which told of broken promises and deception, beat on her brain and reverberated perpetually, like the echo of a distant noise upon the nerves of some pain-distracted sufferer.

## CHAPTER XIV.

“In sooth deceit maketh no mortal gay.”

THUS, while Stanley Wyldish was striving to grope his way through the mystery which enveloped Violet, the passing hours were a desolate blank to her. But on the morrow, the elasticity of her youth asserted itself, and she rose with a clearer perception and a more balanced mind.

She wrote, therefore, to Lady Marchmont, seeing clearly that Arundel's wife must stay no longer in concealment. The subsequent events of the day proved the wisdom of her decision.

Lionel Harcourt could profit nothing by

the advantage which he hoped the flight of Violet might afford him in his desperate circumstances. He was, as his wife had stated in her telegram, detained on the following day, and therefore unable to proceed to town.

When the maid delivered the news, which confirmed their suspicion of the destination which Violet had chosen, the thought of the Carringtons immediately occurred to him. He was aware of Jack's appointment, and had, indeed, assisted to establish the worthy couple in their new home. Whether Stanley Wyldish was, or was not, cognizant of their whereabouts, was unknown to him. Anyhow, the intention of Lionel Harcourt was to avoid meeting Stanley Wyldish, until he had interrogated Susan and her husband. He was exasperated, therefore, by his unexpected detention. He felt that the ground on which he stood might give way at any moment.

Stanley Wyldish had the start of him, and

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either at the Carringtons', or elsewhere might secure Violet's hearing; and quickly estimate some of the causes of her sudden withdrawal from his house.

Moreover, he knew that if Stanley Wyldish and Violet met, it must prove an alienating circumstance to himself from her. That which he would have braved with her, he had no inclination to encounter without her.

He was calculating enough, even at this zenith of his passion, to know that while he might outlive its fire, yet he scarcely could hope to live down the circumstances of its declaration, if they gained publicity. His hate for Stanley Wyldish was intensified with every breath which he drew.

Few are so hated as those whom we know that we have wilfully wronged, and, as Lionel Harcourt stretched out his hands to Violet, with an offering of worthless love, and an equally worthless offer of the sacrifice of posi-

tion and honour, he knew that he was basely endeavouring to supplant one, who had a right to approach her with his purer gifts. The calm presence of his wife reminded him of this continually.

He felt as if he had clambered with difficulty up the steep rocky sides of a precipice. And that, as he did so, he had been catching first at one sharp point of jutting crag, and then at another, helping himself forward, as best he could, when these failed, with slippery weed or dank foliage. Still pushing on, though torn, bleeding, and weary, for the summit whereon stood a figure he would have died to clasp. Already his touch had hovered over her, already her sweet breath had fanned his cheek, when a sudden veil dropped, blinding his eyes. She was withdrawn, and he was sightless upon the dangerous height. One false step would ensure his destruction. A right one, and the gentle ear might again be appealed to.

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He had consequently arranged a time for meeting Stanley Wyldish, so late, that if it occurred at all, it might not be until after he had been to the Carringtons'.

Espionage is a difficult matter to exercise in London, but he had good reason for dreading something of the sort from Stanley Wyldish.

## CHAPTER XV.

“ Is it a foolish dream, an idle and vague superstition ? ”  
“ ’TAIN’T no good asking me no questions, if you please, sir ; Jack’ll be mighty proud to know as ‘ow you was so kind as to call out o’ your way and ax for him ; but Mrs. Vivien ain’t writ to us for a long time. She was biding with my Lady Marchmont when my lord gave Jack his place, and we come here, and I am afraid she were very bad then. Sorry I can’t help you, sir,” said Susan.

Lionel Harcourt felt himself foiled. He had pursued the plan which he had laid down for himself, and after leaving Mrs. Harcourt safely at the hotel upon their arrival in town, had come speedily to the Carringtons’. He

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remained mute, although not vanquished. Susan however resumed, apologetically,

“We ain’t much of writers you sees, sir, Jack and me. Jack’s a bit of a scholar, but then he’s very ’ard at work all day, and six childern an’ all the washin’ don’t leave me much leisure. When I has a bit o’ time to spare, Jack takes me hout a bit. T’other day we went to the city, if you please, sir, and I see St. Paul’s Cathedral for the first time, and coming home the baked potaty shops was a’most as wonderful——”

“You do not let lodgings, then, my good friend, or you would scarcely be able, I fear, to take these pleasant little excursions,” quietly interrupted Lionel Harcourt.

The lodgings were a weak point with Susan. She decided rapidly that she could not deny them, and so lose the chance of future inmates for her drorin'-room floor.

“Yes, sir, I does, but I hasn’t none to let now.”

"I am not surprised to hear it, for I am fully persuaded that you understand the art of making your lodgers perfectly comfortable."

Susan's eyes sparkled with gratified vanity.

"Do you take lady lodgers, or only gentlemen?" he continued.

"Both, sir, if you please, sir," was the ready answer. But the good creature resumed her tactics promptly, and put aside her pleasure at the acceptable flattery which had just been given her. "Yes, sir! both. Lodgers ain't noways so plentiful that those as wants 'em can pick and choose between 'em, as if they was a basket o' herrings. One has to take 'em as they comes; an' if I gets my money an' civil words I takes whichever I can get."

"Quite right, Susan—quite right. If I had been fortunate enough to have found your husband at home, I should have congratulated him upon the possession of so

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sensible a wife. You like gentlemen best, though, I suppose, and have one now?"

"No, sir, I has a lady, if you please, sir; but she don't give no more trouble nor a gentleman. And if you'd be so good, sir, has to recommend my lodgin's, I'd be very grateful to you. They's comfortable, and I knows they's clean; but they ain't used, you see, sir, to reg'lar ladies and gentlemen. We looks for respectable people, as 'll put up wi' me an' the children."

"By-the-by, you don't know," he said, inquiringly, "Mrs. Vivien's address?"

"Oh, yes, sir, if you please, sir, I does. I see Susanne afore she went abroad to Mrs. Vansittart, and she told me as 'ow Greyford Hall, that 'll find her. Them as lives there now takes care on 'er letters, and I knows you can hear of her if you'll just send a bit o' writin' there."

"Confound the woman," inwardly ejaculated the son of Mars, as he peered curiously

around him, and decided it was impossible that Violet could be there. Rustic ignorance so great as this would, he concluded, have betrayed with pomp the dignity of such an inhabitant. Violet could have had no conception that he would be likely to go to the house, and therefore Susan could not have been tutored into dissimulation. But women's wits are sharp, and the calculating major had two to one against him. Violet was there, just over his head, although unconscious of his presence, while the colloquy was going on.

"Very sorry Jack's hout, sir," Susan resumed, as another slight pause ensued after her last remark, "very sorry; but you would like to see the children, maybe, if you please, sir. I'll make bold to fetch them with your leave."

The prospect of a visitation from six dirty, unruly, rough-headed children—such as the fastidious imagination of Lionel Harcourt in-

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stantly concluded Susan's little flock must be —together with an impending inspection from himself, was more a good deal than he could stand. It had, therefore, the effect which Susan hoped, of bringing his visit to a conclusion. She was becoming frightened lest Violet's bell should ring, and, above all, lest Bon-bon should bark. She preserved her presence of mind, however ; and, encouraged by the manner in which she saw her stratagem was working, continued on, “They are only playing a bit in the yard, if you please, sir ; Jack and me doesn't like the streets for 'em ; so I can fetch 'em without keeping you waitin', if you please, sir.”

Lionel Harcourt had not removed his hat and gloves during this conversation, which was held partly at the hall-door and partly in the passage, and at this offer he gave unmistakable signs of immediate retreat, though with many curious glances around him again. Susan took up the retreating

signs, by dropping a little curtsey and putting her hand on the door. She was very grateful to Lionel Harcourt. He had saved the life of her husband, and tried to rescue her child. When she first saw him standing at the threshold of her door, a warm feeling of grateful delight possessed her; but he evinced too soon the special reason of his visit. The pleasure of seeing him, therefore, was quickly alloyed with fears for Mrs. Vivien, and for herself, lest, in defending her promise to the one, she might offend or appear ungrateful to the other. Jack might have helped her, she thought at first, but when the danger was all over, she came to the conclusion that she had done better without him, "For men is sad muddlers with their tongues, and generally says too little or too much—'olds in what they ought to say, or blusters out what they ought not," she remarked to Violet afterwards.

Lionel Harcourt had no sooner excused

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himself from an introduction to the children, than, with a good-natured expression of regret at not being able to stay and see them, he wished Susan good-bye.

She gleefully shut the door after him, and proceeded upstairs to inform Violet of her victorious combat with this first inquisitor.

The prompt click of the closing door grated significantly on the ear of Lionel Harcourt. It gave so broad a hint of relief at his departure, and was so suggestive of the fact that he had been outwitted, that he paused momentarily upon the short flight of steps which led from the house.

But, if “walls have ears,” they are certainly not transparent, and he gained nothing from the angry glance which he threw at the outside of the house.

He had at all times, however, a wholesome horror of attracting attention to himself by any extravagant actions. Therefore, although he would have given anything for the re-

appearance of Susan, yet he desisted from summoning her. His cab was waiting for him. He stepped on the pavement, and took out his watch as he gave orders to the driver. Pretending to consult the time, he thus secured an opportunity for another scrutiny of the abode he had just quitted.

There exist numberless theories concerning animal magnetism, presentiments, and a variety of other causes by which a sort of clairvoyance, with regard to an intensified wish, is often experienced. But, however this may be, it is certain that, although there was no flaw in the skill with which Susan had parried his questions, Lionel Harcourt felt convinced as he drove away that Violet was in some manner under her charge, and that he had even been near to her.

He was intensely chagrined and disappointed. This visit to Susan had been his *pièce de résistance*, and had in fact bounded his defined course of action. He moodily

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transacted some trifling business matters, using them as an excuse to himself for not keeping his appointment with Stanley Wyldish.

He had calculated that if he had succeeded in discovering Violet, this appointment would have made him secure, in the knowledge that Stanley Wyldish was in another direction.

But his interrogations had not taken up much space of time, and as the probability was great that his wife and Stanley Wyldish would not so quickly terminate their interview, it left something like an hour to be disposed of, still upon his hands.

Stanley Wyldish, however, was suffering too much mental distress to prolong the meeting with Mrs. Harcourt. Again, the absence of her husband, although she accounted for it quite naturally, and begged him to wait for his return according to the desire which Lionel Harcourt had asked her to express, annoyed and excited his indignant

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suspicious. Fearful of betraying himself, he left her, and endeavoured to bring about by chance that which Lionel Harcourt was evidently bent upon avoiding. He tried to run him down, but without success.

Lionel Harcourt kept ears and eyes wide open, and although he did not know that Stanley Wyldish was thus seeking his track, he moved from place to place with stealthy caution. More than once a few yards only divided the pursuer from the pursued.

Violet was greatly disturbed at the recital which Susan gave her of the inquiries which Lionel Harcourt had made. Now that he had been so close to her, the security of her hiding-place seemed threatened. She heartily wished that she had written earlier to her kind old friend, Lady Marchmont. The fidelity of Susan, however, was clearly to be relied on, and Violet knew that no greater test could be imposed upon her than that of a denial to Lionel Harcourt.

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The simple obedience of the honest creature had, in the face of what must have been sore perplexity to her, never wavered. She had kept faithful guard over Violet against the cross-questioning of the preserver of her husband, and before one to whom a less staunch and unquestioning adherent might have laid down arms.

Fortunately the word of Violet was law to her ; the touching request which she had made, when she first sought the humble shelter of the “drorin'-room floor,” had been obeyed to the letter, and Susan had earned the emotion of pleasure which she enjoyed as she recounted her prowess to Violet.

Towards the latter part of the succeeding day the gossips, who resided around Susan, were again in a state of excitement. A carriage with a pair of horses attached to it stood at her door, from which a gentleman alighted, who after a short delay was ushered into the house with marks of the most profound respect.

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The neighbours stood on the tip-toe of inquisitiveness.

The horses snorted and rattled their handsome trappings as they impatiently shook their well-bred heads. The coachman watched them idly, and now and then moved them slowly up and down the street, while the tall footman who remained on the pavement looked as curiously at the dwelling, into which his master had vanished, as his perfect training would permit.

At length the letting down of the steps of the carriage, and the attentive attitude of the footman, increased the interest of the watchers. They were not kept long in suspense.

The fair being, who had so stimulated their curiosity, appeared, leaning on the arm of the gentleman. A little dog followed, which, having stopped to growl at the standers by, sprang into the carriage unaided.

Susan smiled and curtseyed. A tiny

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gloved hand waved a last adieu, and in a few seconds the gossips were left, amid the ordinary monotony of their quiet unattractive street—to their scandal, and to their wonderment.

## CHAPTER XVI.

"Angels of Life and Death alike are His!"

THE closed drapery which hangs within the windows of a spacious and luxurious apartment, together with the soft light of wax candles, denote that it is eventide.

Huge logs of wood are blazing and crackling on the old-fashioned open hearth, and are diffusing a pleasant heat into every part of the room. The bright sparks, which they frequently emit, are being watched by Lady Marchmont, although none of the cheery sound, with which they are shot forth, is heard by her.

A placid smile is hovering over her benign

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and stately countenance. Her attitude is one of expectation, and, as time wears on, she takes a letter from a table at her side and peruses it attentively.

In doing so, a tear bedims her aged eyes, while a thanksgiving rises from her heart to the Giver of all good for granting to her, at this last stage of her pilgrimage, the privilege and joy of succouring one of His afflicted children.

Wide open were the portals of her tender-friendship as, a little later on, Violet, who had been conducted to her side by Lord Marchmont, cast herself upon her bosom. When the first moments of agitation had subsided, she seated herself in her accustomed place, and taking the wrinkled hand of Lady Marchmont in that of her own smooth fair one caressed it affectionately.

The hands of both trembled with emotion as they were thus linked together.

The feebler palm of age striving by its pressure to impart a sense of comfort and

protection to the younger, which by its nervous clinging seemed to be pitifully entreating support.

“ You have much for which to censure me, dear Lady Marchmont, but I could not help what I did,” Violet said at length, while sobs impeded her utterance so much, that she could scarcely make herself audible. “ I thought I should like to hide myself from every one; at first even from the sight of God,” she continued, with a shudder; “ and afterwards I feared that He had turned His face from me, and that there was help for me neither here nor in the world to come. But He did not let me think this for long. He is too merciful. My husband and my child are with Him—all sorrow is over for them, while for me—He has brought me safely to you.”

Again she affectionately kissed the hand which she was holding, and then added piteously,

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"I cannot tell you all the particulars of this fresh sorrow which has befallen me, but—"

"You must not talk any more to-night, my dear," interrupted Lady Marchmont soothingly; "it is a great exertion to speak to me for any length of time, therefore you must rest now, and to-morrow you shall tell me all that you wish."

Then with the authority of age, she proceeded gently to insist upon a speedy withdrawal for the night.

Had she felt inclined to deliver it, she saw that the present was no time for reading a homily upon patience and prudence to the weary traveller, who was nestling at her side, and whose fevered cheeks and parched lips alarmed her exceedingly.

Indeed the whole appearance of Violet excited her apprehension.

Together with other dangerous symptoms, an unnatural fire burnt in her hollow eyes,

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while the startled and frightened expression of her little face, which seemed as if shrunk by woe to half its natural size, exhibited the severity of the grief under which she was suffering.

Before retiring to rest, Lady Marchmont stole softly to look once more at Violet, who was already slumbering.

At a first glance, her bright-coloured cheek, as it lay against the pillow, seemed to say that all was well.

But Lady Marchmont was not so deceived. She carefully put back the curtain, so that more light might fall upon the sleeper, and bending down, laid her hand upon the coverlet, that she might feel the symptoms of her breathing.

Violet slept on, but her repose was uneasy. Her tossing hands, and the irregularity of her quick, short gasps for breath, together with the broken fragments of speech which occasionally escaped her, accounted for the

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crimson flush on her face, while they told that although her delicate body was lulled into insensibility, her overcharged mind still wandered.

Lady Marchmont looked anxiously at the form lying before her, and then beckoning an attendant to her side, pointed sadly to the troubled slumber, and left it to tell its own tale.

The woman, whose quick eye readily detected the causes for anxiety, was an experienced and well-skilled nurse. Persuading her ladyship to retire, she established herself for the night within hearing of Violet.

Thus the desolate one was not forsaken. Loving angels ministered to her through kindly hearts upon earth.

The faithful guardianship of Susan was only exchanged for that of others, whose care it would be to make smooth, as far as possible, the path again made rugged by suffering.

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That night found Stanley Wyldish taking rest for the first time since Margaret Harcourt had borne to him the tidings of the mysterious disappearance of Violet.

His search was over : the fugitive had surrendered.

One agony had passed from his soul, when Lord Marchmont informed him that Violet had written to his mother, and that he was even then on his way to convey her to Lady Marchmont.

But until he received the message which told him that no mischance had arisen to frustrate this design, his experience of hope delayed and of disappointment kept him nervously anxious as to the issue.

Pregnant with his unhappy supposition, which after all was not entirely devoid of truth, that Violet had flown to avoid a meeting with himself, he dared not to accompany Lord Marchmont to the Carringtons'.

He waited, therefore, as patiently as he

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could, gnashing his teeth more than once as he did so, against the fate which allowed Lord Marchmont that access to Violet which was denied to himself.

This, with the rest of his trial, he argued to be a punishment for his sins, but he fervently hoped that the misery which he had endured, during the past two or three days, might be deemed a sufficient expiation.

He spread his wreck-chart out before him ere he closed his eyes, knowing but too well what lay hidden under the dark marks traced thereon.

“Again, I thank God that she is not dead!” was his last waking ejaculation.

Yes! Stanley Wyldish, thank God with all your heart that your loved one is not dead, but that, although despair surrounds you now, she may even yet be yours.

Thank Him that hope, although fainting and well-nigh prostrate, still rests by your couch to-night, and that, touching your eyelids

when morning dawns, it will arouse you to renewed energy.

Thank Him, ay, again and again, in humble adoration, that the day has not yet come, when the sweet sunshine brings no ray of light for the future, but tells you that your loving care is over, and that its beams are falling on the closed eyes of one dearer to you than aught else.

Thank Him now for yourself; and when that day arises, thank Him for the glory of another.

## CHAPTER XVII.

"Now waiting to be made a wife."

THE love which converted Basil Cranmore from a pleasure-seeking tourist into a discontented wanderer, met with no additional obstacles.

Wedding bells will soon be ringing joyously.

Silken robes are rustling, and hearts are beating high with pleasure and excitement.

The bridesmaids are arrayed, and await their transit to the church : their pretty faces are subdued into gravity by the importance of the office which they are about to fulfil, while Nellie Lennox, with downcast

eyes and serious mien, is submitting to the final touches of bridal adornment, which Mrs. Lennox is superintending, and watching with all the fond interest of a mother.

Mr. Lennox is in deep consultation with officials of all kinds, and immersed in programmes of every description. Favours, flowers, presents, and all the accessories of a wedding are in order and arranged.

Why, when all is satisfactorily completed, should a panic so often arise at the eleventh hour of the most skilfully planned wedding?

How is it that the baby brother of the prettiest of all the very pretty bridesmaids develops measles the day before the ceremony, and so frightens the mammas of all the other bridesmaids, that they compel his sister to resign her post, thereby costing the bride-elect as much perplexity to replace her, as the election of a prime minister does a nation?

For what reason does the milliner delay sending home the bride's travelling costume,

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until so late an hour of the evening preceding the day upon which the auspicious event is to take place, that it affords the French maid an excuse for indulging in a series of hysterical fits, which render her hopelessly useless, while they increase the general confusion ?

But wherefore at this particular time, and at this particular wedding, when neither of these adversities have overtaken it, and when carriages are driving in quick succession to the house, and reception-rooms are filling to overflowing, does Frederick Cranmore, the bridegroom's brother, ride up in haste, and, emerging from his carriage with grave countenance, seek for Mr. Lennox ?

There is an additional hum of excitement while the brother of the bridegroom, and the father of the bride remain in deep consultation.

"Can anything be the matter with the bridegroom ?" ask the bridesmaids, one of another, with trepidation.

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"Who is to tell dear Nellie if there should be?" is whispered in terrified accents, while flaws in settlements and deeds, cross the more matter-of-fact minds of older people.

But all is right so far. The bridegroom is eagerly waiting at the church for the coming of his bride.

Parchments and settlements have been amicably perused and signed. But the dearest of all the bridegroom's best friends, Stanley Wyldish, his best man, has been summoned from the bridegroom's side, and Frederick Cranmore seeks a substitute.

Half-a-dozen ambitious aspirants are at hand, from whom one is rapidly selected. The trembling bride does not mark the exchange, and the wedding goes on merrily.

But he who has been called from the scene of happiness and festivity is lifting up his hands to heaven with strong cries for mercy.

Amid the clang and peal of church bells,

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the lusty cheers of friends, with the waving of handkerchiefs and a shower of white slippers, the carriage containing the bride and bridegroom departed.

Nellie Cranmore, joyous, radiant, and blushing, is beaming with happiness by the side of her husband.

Sorrowful voices meanwhile are whispering the fear that Violet Vivien is dying.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

"But I know not how we lived those nights."

THREE days had worn away since Violet sat by Lady Marchmont, eager to relate some of her sorrow; but it had been postponed, by the consideration of Lady Marchmont, for an opportunity which then seemed close at hand, but which, alas, had not come yet.

No ray of intelligence had, even for one short moment, been shown by Violet since then, and her troubled sleep had become more and more disturbed.

At an early hour on the following morning, Lady Marchmont was aroused to learn that she was delirious.

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All that day, and the next, it was hoped that the fever might be subdued ; and, for a few hours, it gave some signs of yielding to the remedies employed. But on the third morning it ran so high, that the physicians gave little hope that her strength could withstand it.

In the same room, where we found Lady Marchmont, a few evenings previously, awaiting the arrival of Violet, Lord Marchmont is now expecting Stanley Wyldish.

The door is softly opened, and, upon the entrance of the latter, the two men greeted each other in whispers.

While Stanley Wyldish was looking inquiringly upon the face of his companion, a piercing and unearthly shriek penetrated through the double massive doors and down the long corridors and staircase.

Lord Marchmont understood the iron grip which fastened on his arm, as the sound came to them, while he fain would have

escaped from the mute questioning of the pallid countenance before him.

Again, and again the terrible sound rose and fell, and then a wild shriek, followed by a shrill peal of laughter, was suddenly succeeded by an appalling stillness.

The delirium was at its height, and all within the noble mansion were sick at heart with apprehension.

The sufferer raved incessantly—now singing snatches of old duets, which she and her husband had sung together, and then bursting frantically into yells of horror, or weeping and laughing by turn.

Stanley Wyldish knew that he had not tasted misery to the full until now.

That night of self-accusation at Greyford Hall—that day at the Harcourts', with its dire overthrow of happiness—were as shadows, when compared with the agonizing sorrow of Violet passing from life.

Those weary hours of anxious search—

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those phantoms of dread that she would scorn his love; what were they, in comparison to the bitter thought that she was dying?

“Blessings brighten as they pass;” and the remembrance of Violet, and of her sweet, pure trust for him, through all his shortcomings, added its sting to the acuteness of his unutterable grief.

It is a terrible and fearful woe to stand by one, so loved beyond all others and all else, that every earthly joy, hope, and interest are centred around them, and to know that the conflict between life and death is passing over them.

But, perhaps, it is even more terrible to watch and wait at a distance, however short, when others are nearer.

So Stanley Wyldish thought, as he sat through that evening in breathless dread of what the coming moments should reveal. Sometimes he held a brief consultation with

one or other of the doctors, and sometimes with Lord Marchmont.

But Lady Marchmont was too much over-powered by anxiety to be able to dispense entirely with the companionship of her son.

The hours seemed to Stanley Wyldish to

“ — drag themselves  
Like wounded worms along.”

At last his earnest request was acceded to.

He crept to the entrance of the sick-room, and, scarcely daring to breathe, placed himself behind the large folding-screen just inside the door.

There, at least, the earliest tidings of change would reach him; and there, also, he would not lose an accent of the voice he loved so passionately, and which might so soon be silenced for ever.

He felt as though his heart would break, as he listened.

Violet muttered long of home and of Mrs.

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Vansittart. At last, he was startled by hearing her say, in a low whisper, but yet so distinct, that every syllable of it reached him,

“Do you know Miss Dallingcourt, Arundel?

“They say she is very beautiful—but she has taken my wedding veil away from me.

“Hush! you must not touch it—you will wake her.

“Captain Wyldish is dead, and she has gone all in the dark to cover him with it,—

“See, Arundel! little May is helping her.

“Take my baby May away,” she screamed piteously, “Miss Dallingcourt will kill her.

“Arundel is not dead—he is going to sing with me this evening, and Captain Wyldish is coming.

“I cannot go alone in the train. Hush! —hush!” and the poor invalid’s voice fell again to a thrilling whisper.

“I am going to run away, because they are all so false—so false; but you must not tell them,—

"Come here, Arundel, quite close, close to your little wife, while she tells you what Major Harcourt said."

Stanley Wyldish strained his ear to catch the next sentence, but it died away incoherently. Then she raised her voice again, and went on with her touching, mournful raving—

"I am going back to Arundel, to show him our little May,—

"She and I can go alone, and don't you remember that he has never seen her yet ?

"Who said I might not stay at Greyford Hall and help Arundel gather all the flowers ?

"I must make haste.—May is in the boudoir waiting for me, with Susanne,—

"Where is Susanne ?—I cannot find any one.—What shall I do ?

"Susanne has gone abroad to Major Harcourt. Why did she send him back to talk to me ?

"Has Mrs. Harcourt gone with her ?

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“All gone!—all gone!—all gone!” she moaned, “to look for Captain Wyldish’s broken promise.

“Don’t let Major Harcourt find May,—We are going to run away from him.

“Please make the train go on faster—faster!” she shrieked, with a fresh access of feverish strength.—“Captain Wyldish and Mrs. Harcourt will catch it.

“Arundel did not tell me so.—Take Major Harcourt away!—May is cold,—so cold,—

“Bring me a shawl to wrap round her, and I will carry her to see the flowers in the verandah.

“My own little baby May,—come to me,—and I will tell you all about papa.

“Poor papa! you shall go and see him—soon—in Heaven.—It is not far off.

“Are you ready, Arundel?—Come quickly, Major Harcourt has found Susan Carrington. I thought I tried to lose her,—but the

water was too clear. Take me away, take me away, I am afraid of him. Ha!—there is Miss Dallingcourt again, and she is going to save Major Harcourt from being smothered in the ruins.—Don't you see them?—They are going to fall,—and they are all gold—gold that Captain Wyldish has taken from Arundel, and he has gambled and built them up.—The lightning made them fall down.—Is it not pretty?" she said, with a senseless laugh, pointing to the foot of her bed with her wasted hand.

Then she sang lullabys to May, old hymns, and old songs—wandered with her husband through happy scenes—screamed for him to deliver her from imaginary terrors, and then implored Stanley Wyldish to save her, and take her home.

"Find Arundel, Captain Wyldish, and take me to him,"—were the last distinguishable words which she uttered before exhaustion ensued, and she slept the sleep of life or death.

It lasted long.

Lord Marchmont joined the silent watch,  
behind the screen, while physicians and  
nurses kept a closer guard, as they anxiously  
surrounded the patient.

Not a sound broke through the midnight air.

It seemed to Stanley Wyldish as though  
all the earth were hushed with the hope that  
the Angel of Death might pass her by.

At length a wearied doctor crept noiselessly  
to partake of some refreshment, and to inform  
them that no change whatever had taken  
place.

Upon the awaking depended all the issue.

Time crept slowly on.

The sleeper remained in her death-like  
stupor. Faint streaks of daylight peeped in  
between the closed curtains and chinks of the  
shutters. Light seemed a mockery while this  
dark anxiety was prolonged. But its prolon-  
gation began to prove relief.

The grant of continued sleep vouchsafed,

of nourishment taken, and then a faint hope might even yet be theirs.

The pulse of the patient was not failing.

At these tidings Lady Marchmont came from her own apartment, to unite a trembling ejaculation of thanksgiving with that of Stanley Wyldish.

Still the sleep of Violet remained unbroken.

Anon the physicians withdrew for consultation, and then returned, with no abatement of their fears.

About an hour afterwards there was a slight stir among the attendants.

Stanley Wyldish felt his brain reel, and consciousness for a moment deserted him, as Violet gave a feeble moan.

Presently he was aware that he was being addressed, and he vaguely understood that he was to follow the speaker.

He stretched out his arms with the strong impulse of affection towards Violet, as he found himself in her presence.

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All were kneeling around her bed, while the doctors, who were supporting her, patiently endeavoured to administer stimulants.

Mastering his emotion by a strong effort, he sank upon his knees with the others.

There are some feelings which are too deep and sacred for description, and such dwelt with him at that dread time.

Violet had spoken a few words to them all, and as she lay serenely calm and still, she whispered to Stanley Wyldish that she was "going home."

Hushing the clamorous grief within himself, and stooping down, he kissed her forehead passionately, as the last faint syllable was pronounced. As he raised his head, and fixed upon her his glance of grief and love, her sweet lips parted with a feeble smile, which told him that his tenderness was recognized.

Clasping the hand which he had so often prayed that he might touch again, he once more knelt by her side.

Before long her eyelids drooped, and she was again wrapped in unconsciousness.

Then succeeded a day, the result of which was conveyed to Margaret Harcourt in three words, full of woful import, "She is sinking."

It was even so.

Hope was utterly abandoned.

But at the last moment, when convulsive sobs were bursting from every bosom, and when each slight breath was feared to be her last, she rallied almost miraculously, and from that hour, a slow but steady tide of improvement set in.

Their prayers had been answered.

Mourned as lost, she was given back to life.

There was yet work for her to do.

## CHAPTER XIX.

"Of perfect wifehood and pure lowlihead."

CONSCIENCE was making a despicable coward of one who was brave by nature. From the time when Lionel Harcourt had been baffled by the respectful civility of Susan Carrington, until now, he had suffered deplorably. For any harm that should happen to Violet he held himself to be the responsible agent, while his love rendered the notion of peril to her insupportable.

In one sense, therefore, the relief was great, when the note arrived from Stanley Wyldish, telling of her safety, and sojourn with Lady

Marchmont. The load was lightened, but it was still heavy.

In this instance, as it was with Lionel Harcourt, so was it also with Stanley Wyldish.

But a greater burden was in store for each.

It came to Stanley Wyldish as, with heavy heart, he was fulfilling his engagement to his friend, and striving for the sake of Basil Cranmore to be gay and happy. He staggered under the agony of the load.

But when it came to Lionel Harcourt, its weight was increased by hopelessness.

Sitting at his breakfast table, with his wife opposite to him, her faltering voice had said, "Lionel, dear Lionel, Mrs. Vivien is dying."

From Stanley Wyldish, as he read the summons which took him from wedding guests and joyful bridegroom, there ascended a cry to God for pity, for mercy, and for life.

But when the soft voice of Margaret Harcourt altered the words of the telegram, which

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said that Violet was sinking, to those of "Lionel, dear Lionel, Mrs. Vivien is dying," there fell a sound so strange upon her ear, that she started to her feet and rushed towards her husband.

It was a strong man's cry of remorse and wretchedness, wrung from his self-command by the suddenness of the announcement.

More than wife-like pity, for sudden sorrow made the lips of Margaret Harcourt quiver as she kissed her husband tenderly. More than womanly pity sought to soothe his anguish.

She had prayed, waited, and been patient, and, at last, his heart turned to her in its travail.

One more telegram reached the husband and wife. It concluded with, "Pray for her."

Of all who loved Violet, perhaps Margaret Harcourt was the best able to do this.

Away from the immediate scene of distress, and with no passionate love to agonize her, and no remorse to distract her, with none of those

disturbing elements, which will at times weigh down the most prayerful spirit, she ceased not her supplications that the life of Violet might be spared.

When better accounts arrived, Lionel Harcourt and his wife returned home, and when all immediate anxiety was over, and he could complete his arrangements, he sold out of the army, and shortly afterwards quitted England for Rome.

## C H A P T E R   X X.

“I must tell her, or die.”

EAVESDROPPING is a crime, so reprehensible and offensive, that none have ever been found, no matter whether forgiving by nature or principle, to plead for it.

Young and old, peer and peasant, rough and gentle, weak and strong, alike condemn it.

Peeping Tom of Coventry has been handed down from days of yore, to juvenile and adult contempt, and his sudden blindness has excited no commiseration. But even the memory of the base curiosity of Peeping Tom, arouses no keener hatred than that which possesses many an honest-hearted

school-boy, as he lustily vociferates that “listeners never hear good of themselves.”

Eavesdropping!—that irresistible temptation to waiting-men and women—the sin of the low and narrow-minded.

Reader! after this panegyric, convict us of inconsistency, for we ourselves are eavesdropping. We confess it with shame and contrition, and, we would add to the enormity of our guilt, by seeking to make you a participator in our offence.

Tread very softly down the broad trimly-kept gravel path before you. Stay not to feast your eyes upon the sweet spring flowers. Diverge not, either to yonder bank of primroses, or that shaded bed of sweetly-scented violets.

If you be feminine, let not so much as the rustle of your soft garments be heard. Brave the light wind now blowing “from the gates of the sun,” and move not your hand in search of sheltering veil. Hazard the

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work of sunshine upon your spotless complexion, and disturb not the atmosphere by so much as the unfurling of your parasol.

That which we wish to hear, even the fluttering of a butterfly's wing might disturb.

If you be masculine, we know full well that our injunctions will be unheeded.

We hear distinctly your determined step, as with lordly stride you grind your heel, louder than is your wont, upon the pebbles in the path, and then we hear you coughing loudly, as mortal man ne'er coughed before, and thereby you frustrate the accomplishment of our heinous crime, and destroy the silence which we wish to keep.

Therefore away ! The path leads us by its gentle windings, to the edge of a clear and rippling stream, across which a rustic bridge is thrown. The wind is murmuring gently among the tender leaflets of the trees, and distant voices blending with it, harmonize with its music.

We pause in listening attitude, and then, crossing the bridge, step cautiously forward. The sweet accents of a voice we know full well, now rise clearly and more clearly, until the sound of the soft breeze seems to have died away, and the whole air to be filled with its cadence.

“I do not know,” are the first words which meet our guilty ears, “why one remembers some things and not others, which have happened to us in childhood, or why some books make such deep impressions on minds, while the contents of others fade quite away. It must be a grave and great responsibility to write a book, and I, who have passed all my life so uselessly, often wonder how any are found to undertake the task.”

There was a short silence, and then deeper tones replied :—

“There are those who live without compiling books, but who write the teaching of

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their goodness so plainly in their lives, that no other form of usefulness is needed."

"Personal influence is perhaps even a graver responsibility," was the answer. "Yet both gifts are great, and inspire a sensation of fear lest they should be mis-used. I was very young when I first read the 'Shadow of the Cross,' and it seemed to me that I should never tire of poring over it, and when I grew older, I thought continually of its allegory.

"The 'Shadow of the Cross!' It fell over Arundel while he lived, and it fell over him when he died. It is long since I have been able to speak to you of my husband. During my illness I seemed so near to him, that it is a greater comfort than ever for me to talk of him."

"During my illness!" We have not erred in our conjecture. That sentence, together with the bath-chair drawn up under the shade of a luxuriant rhododendron, guarded

by Bon-bon, tells us that Violet Vivien is only hidden from our sight by the slight erection of wood and thatch, which forms her bower for the present.

We have passed over the long weeks of her tardy recovery—the alternating hopes and fears, with the prostration of strength, which added to the winter's gloom, and we have brought her forth with renewed powers, both of mind and body, to rejoice in the fresh springtide.

Our sin, thus successfully committed, has hardened us, and made us bold. Listening has led us on to peeping, and we have now arrived at a full view of the interior of the summer-house, from whence issue the voices of Violet Vivien and Stanley Wyldish.

This sylvan retreat, which is situated in a distant part of the grounds, surrounding the residence of Lady Marchmont, is lined with wood of various colours, fantastically arranged in different patterns around its sides and upon

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its roof. Abjuring the uncomfortable benches, which usually form the seats of such an abode, its owner has arranged it with low garden chairs.

Reclining upon one of these, with cushions at her head, and shawls piled carefully around her, we behold Violet.

Her hat has fallen to the ground by her side, and she is evidently enjoying the refreshing air, which is playing over her brow. There are traces of the peril through which she has passed still lingering in the changing hue of her cheek, and in the delicacy of the taper fingers which are holding closely to her throat a soft warm wrap.

A beam of sunshine has forced its way into the entrance of the summer-house, and is falling brightly at her feet.

Ferns are throwing up their crosiers around the exterior, while the clear stream, as it glides peacefully along, adds its tribute of beauty to the scene.

Gentle doves with burnished breasts, are making soothing melody in the wide-spreading branches, which form a second roof to that which is sheltering Violet and Stanley Wyldish.

All nature is blithe, and the sounds which are wafted from the fragrant meadows in the “rich spring breeze,” are those of unrestrained rejoicing.

There is brightness over everything which meets the senses of Violet, but there is a brightness in store for her on this glad spring morning, other than that in which surrounding objects are bathed, while a pure, unselfish rejoicing fills the heart of Stanley Wyldish.

The past winter has not been spent by him in idleness. The ravings of Violet had unfolded the unwelcome information that he had been treacherously forestalled in the explanation with which he had travelled to meet her at the Harcourts, and which he longed intensely to make to her. The awful thought that she

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would die, with this knowledge unsoftened by his pleaded penitence and love, almost drove him mad. Work was his safeguard from utter despondency, and work for her was the support of his failing courage. He had often seen Violet as she progressed towards convalescence, but never until now, alone. Lady Marchmont had been indefatigable in her care of the invalid, and the slightest excitement was an evil, against which it was of paramount importance to guard.

Now, however, she recognized the impatience of our hero to impart his intelligence, so, with many warnings, and many injunctions, she entrusted Violet to his care.

Before the year should close, and old church bells "ring out the old, ring in the new," Violet Vivien would be re-instated mistress of Greyford Hall.

It was for this that Stanley Wyldish had toiled, and for this success he now rejoices. He would rather have cast himself again

before her ere this turn in the tide of fortune reached her, but although “Man proposes, God disposes,” and his disinterestedness might not thus be proved. She, for whose love he would ask, would not be the powerless, impoverished one which his generosity would have preferred.

God had heard the widow’s prayer. She would return to her old home, and Stanley Wyldish had earned the right of imparting this joyful intelligence. But with Lady Marchmont’s anxious instructions before him, he waited for a favourable opportunity of gently breaking the news. Before venturing upon the subject, he attracted her attention to some wild flowers which he had gathered for her.

“They are very pretty,” Violet said, while an arch smile played around her mouth. “You must have been very energetic to have found so many. I remember some one, who, in days gone by, used to consider it too much trouble to stoop and gather himself a straw-

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berry, and who, when rallied for his laziness, drew lamentable pictures of the fatigue which would inevitably have ensued upon the indulgence of such rashness. I fear this little nosegay must have involved unwonted exertion, but I trust no serious consequences have followed."

She laughed as she continued—"When some one was so idle, I think that I must have been much more clever than I am now, for then I could have told him the name of every flower here, while now I see several which completely puzzle me."

It was pleasant to note her young voice freed from the wail of pain and grief which had so often mingled with its sweetness. Doubly pleasant, also, to Stanley Wyldish, brim-full as his mind was of all that he had to tell her, and he responded, as laughingly as she had spoken—

"I never can remember the names of any but buttercups and daisies. Laziness is a

constitutional defect of mine, although the morale of your speech, Mrs. Vivien, is decidedly more to the benefit of my transcendent powers of self-denial than to the credit of my idleness.

" You see I recognize myself to be 'some one.' However, my Pharisaical attempt to draw attention to my self-denial fades before the recollection of strawberries and cream in such profusion that the gathering of the former as an act of self-indulgence was clearly a work of supererogation."

They both laughed again, and then he continued, merrily. " Do you remember the treat you gave the work-house children from —, and how that many of the poor little wretches had never seen strawberries before ? It was a difficult matter at first to persuade them to taste them, but their repugnance soon turned into unmitigated approval."

Violet smiled acquiescence rather sadly. Aware that he had unintentionally called up

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painful memories, and anxious to dispel them, he resumed quickly—

“ If the weather continues like this, we shall have strawberries ripen out of doors before April is over. It has been a wonderful spring.”

“ It has been a wonderful spring for me,” she said. “ These warm days have given me fresh life. I love to sit here and feel the fresh air blowing over my head, which still aches a good deal at times. Bon-bon takes care of me, and I shut my eyes, and sometimes build fairy castles in the air, although oftener, I think, dream of those that are fallen. My pet vision is that of being permitted to go to my old home again. I fancy myself there, moving about the familiar rooms, and I even hold long conversations, in fancy, with the poor people—lecture them, as I used to. One night I really dreamt, all night long, that I was at home. It was very nice to be happy all those hours. I have

tried to invoke a repetition, but have never succeeded. One has more power over day-dreams, but I am afraid they do not argue much for the wisdom of the dreamer. I wonder whether Miss Firmstone was ever guilty of such an act of indiscretion. Did I tell you, Captain Wyldish, of the excellent situation she has obtained?"

"I think not," he replied.

His answer was given somewhat absently, and did not check the continuance of Violet's communication.

"She wrote to me about a fortnight since, and her letter instantly converted me to the truth of handwriting being a faithful delineator of character. Such upright, formal, square characters! The image of Miss Firmstone, in deed and appearance. I will show it to you, when we go in. I am sure it will amuse you."

But Stanley Wyldish did not feel as if he wished just then to be so amused. A little

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pain was beginning to gnaw at his heart. It was the hunger of his love eating its way through every other feeling.

Through each conversation which he had held with Violet he had striven with a force made mighty by his longing, to imagine that in some manner she connected him in her thoughts for the future. But he had been unable to delude himself into the happy belief. He had gathered enough from her delirium to understand that her flight had not been solely from him, and her manner had since reassured him upon this point. But the thought that her happy dreams by day and night excluded all remembrance of him was smiting him now.

He leant, with a sudden air of dejection, against the post which supported the arched entrance to the summer-house.

Violet looked at him, inquiringly. Her clear soft eyes fixed themselves anxiously upon his face, and with their kindly expression drew from the depths of his soul such

an overwhelming torrent of love that it burst all bounds, and carried him to her side, where, kneeling by her, he clasped her hands entreatingly in his.

She moved them away, and drew herself farther from him.

The action portended sorrow to him, but he remembered the necessity for keeping her free from agitation, and, therefore, he restrained all expression of his grief.

Passing his hand across his face to hide the distress which he knew was painted there, he rose slowly to his feet, and once more looked from their rustic shelter upon the scene without. But there was no charm so potent as that cast over him by the fair being within.

He turned to gaze upon her again.

She was patting Bon-bon, and her long eyelashes almost rested on the heightened colour of her cheek, with the shy drooping of her eyelids. She was the first, however, to speak.

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“ You have something to tell me, Captain Wyldish, and I am quite ready to hear it.”

It was a kindly recall, a gracious woman’s act of courtesy, after inflicting the pain of repulsion, and it was, moreover, a brave woman’s generous act for giving an opportunity for the utterance of that which might prove to be another’s justification.

She had shrunk from him with reserve and pride while a doubt of his truth remained, but she was ready, by the light of her own sincerity, to listen to the explanation which she clearly saw he desired should now take place.

He relaxed his compressed lips, and the gloom on his brow dispersed as he answered—

“ I have, indeed, much to tell you; and I trust that it will give you pleasure. Just now I had almost forgotten it, and was about to speak of myself rather than of this most important matter to you. I think I must have lived years instead of months since that

last evening at Greyford Hall. You know the various circumstances which, since then, have prevented our meeting again, but you can never estimate the bitter misery of this delay to me. I have thought you lost—have thought you dying—wretchedness of all kinds has beset me. Do not turn from me as you did just now, Violet," he cried, imploringly. "Let me tell you of all my folly, of all my unhappiness, and of the little I have done for you, but which, thank God, has proved successful. Above all, let me speak of that of which I tried to tell you when last we were alone. You remember what it was—do you not? It was of my love for you, Violet."

The smile she cast upon him, as she bent her head, conveyed a wealth of sweet promise.

"You remember it, Violet," he repeated. "But I must not wander back to that yet. Without my poor affection, dear Violet, there is happiness in store for you. Your wish is

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granted, and I am almost too glad to know how to speak the words; but before long, Greyford Hall, your old home, will be yours again. I could not arrange for you to stay, when you asked me so piteously to let you do so, but if you will allow me I will take you there once more, and none shall ever have power to bid you leave it again."

For the second time the name of Stanley Wyldish escaped the lips of Violet, and then she turned so pale that he feared, after all, he had not been sufficiently careful and guarded in the manner of his announcement.

Great and unexpected joy is hard to bear calmly, when it is first made known to us, and this was all so different from what Violet was expecting to hear, that her self-command nearly deserted her. She struggled hard for composure, however, and soon expressed her unfeigned delight and gratitude.

It was pure, genuine joy, uttered with a girlish frankness.

She had many questions to ask, and then she attempted again to thank him ; but he interrupted her by saying, earnestly,

“ You do not know what a pleasure it has been for me to do this for you. It has been my one drop of comfort, and you must not thank me any more. Wait until I have told you all that you have to forgive.”

Her mind, at first, failed to appreciate the meaning of what he said. She was so wrapped in the pleasant anticipation of her return to Greyford Hall, that she would like to have gone on talking about it, and she felt too pleased to be able to attend to anything else. But the increasing gravity of her companion could not be withstood, and the word “ forgive ” made her nervous. Sorrow had, of late, been so much more constantly her companion than joy that she was quick to take alarm at the faintest sign of its approach.

“ May I go on without appearing selfish ?”

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he asked. “ When you have heard me, you will know that I dare not leave what I wish to say to the risk of another meeting. Thrice, ay, more than thrice—I have journeyed to lay my burthen at your feet, and each time it has been rendered impossible by a stronger hand than mine. I know not where to begin ; and, having begun, I know not where to conclude, lest at the conclusion I receive the doom which I know I deserve. Violet—have pity on me—my promise to you has long been a broken one.”

There was a faint, sorrowful exclamation from her.

A moment of silence, and then a bright, sparkling substance flew past him swiftly.

He knew it was the jewel which she had held hitherto in token of his faith. The diamond anchor which only his own tongue could have made her cast away.

He sought for it at once.

At the sound of his step, “ The snake slipt

under a spray," while the startled water-rat swam to another home.

The gem had fallen at the brink of the stream, and there rested against a tuft of grass. Its glittering surface made it easy to find.

Stanley Wyldish carried it slowly back, and it was as though sudden darkness had come over that sunny sylvan retreat.

" You will never deign to take it back, I know," he said, glancing imploringly at the face which he had never before seen wear so cold a disdain. " I despair of your forgiveness; but hear me to the end. I would have nothing hid from you."

" Will not the recital be putting us both to needless pain?" inquired Violet, in a constrained voice; and then she added, " I scarcely feel as if I ought to listen to one who must have wilfully and unnecessarily deceived me. Something of this has already reached me; but I have sifted, sorted, and arranged the information in my own mind since my

illness, and, without your confirmation now, should have given it no credence. Your confession should have been made, when it was first necessary, and not after this long delay."

## CHAPTER XXI.

"Requiring at her hand the greatest gift."

THE anchor—the pledge which she had accepted of him in happy days, in token of his well-kept promise—still lay in his hand.

Sorrow was depicted in every line of his countenance as he said,

"Yes! it has been much too long delayed. But this, at any rate, has been no fault of mine. I have come often to tell you that I no longer dared to beg that you would hold this trifle in your keeping. You have thrown it away, as I always feared you would. Violet," he exclaimed, passionately, "is there no hope of pardon for me?"

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“ This is unworthy of us both,” she cried, blushing deeply, and speaking hurriedly. “ I must ever forgive one to whom I am bound by so many cords of gratitude, although I can scarcely suppose that either my forgiveness or the withholdance of it can be of much importance to you. Captain Wyldish, you have asked me to remember that last evening passed in my own house, when you and I were alone. I do so quite well, and the question which I asked you then, before I complied with your request, will best explain my meaning. Left as I was to your charge by my husband, you surely should not have required that mark of confidence at my hands with untrue words upon your lips. It was mockery to me, and for this I flung away the outward token you gave me long ago of your truth, and for this I would end an interview so happily commenced and so unhappily terminated.”

“ Not terminated yet,” he said gently; “ others have impugned my honour to you,

and my broken vow has been a misery which has driven me to greater. I throw myself upon your goodness, and your patience. I must tell you everything before you send me from you. It is my only chance of peace hereafter. God knows what a blessing a kind word of counsel from you will be to me. It was you who first assisted me to better things. I have let them go, but only to wish more earnestly that I had retained them. With you rests my only hope, therefore let me speak."

He drew near to her, and again his tall figure was kneeling at her side, as he proceeded with the utmost gentleness, well knowing how sacred were the fields of grief upon which he was going to tread.

"I broke my promise to you, before Arundel died. It is idle to blame others for my sins, but in an evil hour I met an old and boon companion with whom I was associated in Malta ; your ears, Violet, should never hear

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of folly such as mine. I had been fond of gambling when abroad, and he had initiated me into its snares. He renewed his profession of friendship for me with loud protestations when we met. Before long he twitted me upon my changed habits, and upon my cowardice in not giving him his revenge. He had lost money to me—debts of honour we men call them. I was ever headstrong. One evening his irony stung me into yielding to his temptation, and for a short time the provocation seemed to me to be my justification, but I cannot describe the wretchedness that followed. I played recklessly, and I lost—lost a great deal more in my foolishness than I knew how to pay. There was no help for me. I felt utterly undone. The next day I tried to retrieve my loss : I need not tell you that I was unsuccessful. My old habit partially asserted itself over me : but I determined to come as soon as I could get leave, and tell you all. Although usu-

ally most fortunate in getting away, just then, I could not. Matters therefore became worse. It is a miserable confession, but I entangled myself in more ways than one ; and the more unhappy I was, the more desperate I became. At last I got my leave and I came to you—to your happy household, and I found Arundel ill. It was no time for me to intrude my wretched self upon your notice. I saw this little gem sparkle as you kindly wore it in token of your trust, and I loathed myself. I withdrew, but only to be recalled for a sadness, which rendered my silence imperative. I cannot dwell upon this. Enough that I was able to be of service to you, therefore I dared to approach you. After a while, dear Violet, when you were all too much absorbed in grief to notice it, grew my deep love for you. I knew that my broken promise, and my renewed flirtation with Miss Dallingcourt, rendered it almost hopeless, but it had taken root in my heart, and could

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not be set aside. I tried to drown it in frivolity but I could not. Then Mrs. Van-sittart married, and you went from Greyford Hall. In mad jealousy I rushed more blindly into folly. You passed me one day in the park, and you who are so good and true, Violet, will fail to comprehend how I, worshipping you with the adoration of a slave, strove to forget you in the society of another.

“As shipwrecked men sometimes madly aggravate their burning thirst by seeking to slake it from the waters of the briny deep, so did I, in my frantic endeavour to gain oblivion through excitement, increase my misery. It was the very acme of suffering, I could not run the chance of meeting you in like manner again, therefore I left town precipitately.”

“If you had only spoken to me, Captain Wyldish,” Violet began nervously, and then, as she remembered who her companion had

been at the time to which he referred, she checked herself.

"The insanity of jealousy prevented me," he answered; "the same insanity, Violet, which although you never knew it, urged me to write, rather than come to you, when it was necessary for you to leave Greyford Hall. I cannot bear to think of it all," he cried passionately. "But half fiend as I must have been then, I yet determined that nothing should prevent me from telling you my tale of weakness. My honour required to be appeased by my confession. Again it could not be; I had known nothing of May's illness, and, Violet, when I first arrived, I feared that you had both gone from this miserable world. I can never unfold to you the agony of the weeks which succeeded my arrival. You were so crushed, and I had another trial to impart to you. I tried to hide my love: I sat for hours in the lonely night beneath your window. I knew that I could

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not betray my secret there, and I hoped that the holy Angels, who were keeping their watch over you, would pity my sorrow. For weeks I kept my resolve to abide by the punishment for my errors and keep silent. I knew that your trust once shattered, there would be little hope of your love. I would not ask for the one without confessing my betrayal of the other.

“ Then came the evening preceding your departure. I sat alone in the verandah, and Susanne came with a desire that I should come to you. Well may we both remember what followed. Love such as mine could no longer be held in check. But, dearest, could I at that time be the chronicler of my own misdoings?

“ Believe me there was no mockery to you in what I said.

“ Oh! Violet,” he exclaimed earnestly, while he trembled with emotion, “ could there be reason why your hand should not rest on one whose heart and soul belonged to you, and

who was ready to efface his sin by any penance you might command, save that of utter banishment from your presence?"

He paused a few moments, and then proceeded to recall the manner in which her sudden illness had concluded their interview, and the various circumstances which had from time to time kept him from her, and had rendered his present explanation an impossibility.

Violet listened attentively to every word which he was uttering. They were the links to her which connected many a past wonderment with the reality of facts.

Her indignation against the offender was fast softening as she asked timidly,

"Did you go on gambling, after I left Greyford Hall?"

"I merit the distrust of such a question," he answered, sorrowfully. "But that one touch of your little hand, darling, left me a talisman with which I defied temptation, although the future was still dark and doubt-

ful. Pecuniary embarrassments strove also to push me from you—all my own fault, I know, Violet. May God bless you for thus listening to me; but I will hurry on. One evening I was alone, and Miss Dalling-court——”

“ Then all that terrible story is true, and you were saved from something dreadful only by this lady ?” Violet interposed.

“ Not so. She did a generous and kind action for me, one that, for both of us, it would have been wiser had she left undone; but this she did not then comprehend. Your informant must one day account to me for this interference, and for speaking to you of my affairs with so much misinterpretation,” he added, bitterly.

“ I guess his name without inquiry for it, as certainly as I now recognize whose were the eyes that for long haunted me with their expression of hatred. May I go on ?”

Violet gave a gesture of acquiescence, and he continued,

"Miss Dallingcourt left me to become my enemy, and I waited for my long-desired coming to you. Never shall I forget how my heart bounded as I neared the Harcourts' house.

"Never shall I forget, either, how it sank when I was told that you had flown—mysteriously flown—from me, from us all.

"Once more my confession was impossible.

"I had known Mrs. Harcourt in Malta. She sought me out in her kindness, spoke frankly to me of our early acquaintance, and soon we were talking with mutual interest of you. So by degrees I confided the story of my affection for you to her. Then out of the resources of her ample fortune, she offered me that which the gossip of the world had distilled from Miss Dallingcourt's visit, and had made her think was necessary for me. But, thank Heaven! I can again assure you that I accepted no assistance at the hands of a lady. She did not tell you of our acquaintance. There was much concerning me of

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which for her to assure herself, while you invited her to no confidence by the mention of my name. Moreover, your state of health still required that you should be kept perfectly free from anxiety and excitement. As soon as you were better, she arranged everything for our meeting, leaving me with truest kindness and delicacy to explain everything, and to plead for myself. Since the woe of your flight, has been that of your long and fearful illness. To have lost you then, would have been death to me also—to lose you now, would be worse than death."

The tears coursed each other down his cheeks, and he did not try now to conceal his distress, as he said,

"If you cannot forgive me, Violet, say at least that you pity me."

"I do both," she answered, sweetly. "I am glad that you have told me all this. Now I must try to help you, as I used to do. Because we have let go once, we need not do so any more."

She spoke very slowly, paused, and then continued,

“We must rather try to hold the faster. You will feel this, will you not?” she went on, “and but for its sorrowful warning, forget that broken promise. Then, at some future day, my little anchor may come back to me.”

“And you, Violet, and you?” he murmured, fondly.

“I shall be trusting in you as I have always been,” she replied.

Her voice trembled, and gathering tears glistened in her eyes, as she received his eloquent thanks.

“How saddened you have been by all this,” she resumed, musingly, “and yet how you have worked for me, and tried to comfort me. But for my grief, I should, I am sure, have discovered that something was troubling you. How strangely everything has altered since Arundel went away, but in what a variety of forms suffering comes to us, and how hard it

is to bear when it comes. I, who know this so well, would like to help you if I can."

"*If* you can, Violet?"

The impassioned face that turned on hers, the impassioned voice which repeated her words, left her little doubt of this.

Before long Stanley Wyldish was carefully escorting her to the house. The garden chair was dispensed with, and she was leaning upon his arm in quiet, happy confidence.

Once again she was holding the light before him, by which in her weakness she had been made strong, and which her steady hand would hold until his strength became as hers.

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Troubles have gradually cleared away. Mistakes have caused a keener search for wisdom. Violet is not now the inhabitant of the "drorin'-room floor," belonging to Jack and Susan Carrington, and which we hope they have not now to let, but is the denizen of the luxurious one at Greyford Hall.

Mr. and Mrs. Basil Cranmore are there also. Happiness has not spoiled either, and Nellie is even now delighting old Lady Marchmont by one of her honest tirades against hypocrisy. Her few months of married life have not changed her juvenile vivacity, and she is eagerly imparting her opinions to her ladyship, at the brink of the yawning mouth of one of the silver trumpets.

Basil has, perhaps, assumed a more important bearing. He is talking to Lord Marchmont, while Violet, who is standing between them, joins frequently in their conversation. The lines of care are daily becoming fainter upon her expressive face, while those of thoughtfulness and earnest purpose are deepening.

She is attired in white, with here and there a broad black ribbon amid the soft folds of her dress. No ornaments adorn her but those of a few colourless blossoms in her hair, and a diamond anchor which sparkles upon

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her bosom. We found her the sweet and suffering mistress of Greyford Hall, and we leave her there, mistress once more, and less suffering.

Stanley Wyldish is again an expected guest, and the party for dinner is waiting for his presence to complete it.

The "woe" of the broken promise has taught its own lesson. Pure lips have pronounced more than forgiveness to the "traitor."

He who in "letting go" well-nigh lost all that made life dear to him, is "holding fast" now, with another life clinging to him. Jealousy, heart-burning, and distrust have passed away from Stanley Wyldish. Loneliness will soon have ceased to be for Violet Vivien.

THE END.





